

Farmers Organisations Leading Research & Innovation on agroecology for sustainable food systems (FO-RI)

At-a-glance

Objective: to drive transition towards resilient, productive and sustainable agroecological food systems through farmer-led innovation and research.

Lead countries/organization(s): EU, AgriCord Alliance

Place: 16 countries in Africa (Burkina, Mali, Senegal, Cameroun, Burundi, RDC, Madagascar, Tanzania), Asia (Philippines), Pacific (Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Samoa), Caribbean (Haiti) and Latin America (Brazil & Uruguay)

Background and Objectives

Various action-research experiences suggest that supporting small-scale farmers to build on their innovations through farmer-led joint research with scientists is important for good management of natural resources and for climate change adaptation. Moreover, farmer-led research strengthens the resilience of rural communities and helps farmers to maintain and improve their livelihoods in fast changing contexts. Farmer Organisations' (FO) support is crucial to leverage their potential in research and innovation to transition to agroecological production and sustainable food systems. Agroecological sustainable practices are key to cope with climate change and to meet increasing food needs. From the FO perspective, agroecology entails adopting natural farming systems to increase soil fertility, manage pests and diseases, and build resilience to climate change, while reducing production cost and increasing income. FOs also see agroecology as the realisation of their right, and as an approach to peer-to-peer learning and exchange of experiences.

Resilient, productive and sustainable agroecological agri-food systems secured through farmer-led innovation and research (goal) represent the impact of three key expected changes (outcomes) of the EU-funded FORI programme: (i) Strengthened national and regional institutional support for farmer-led action research on innovative agroecological approaches, (ii) Increased local farmer know-how to apply agroecological approaches and to innovate for sustainable and resilient agroecological agri-food systems, and (iii) Enhanced organizational capacities of FO and partner entities' to support farmer-led agroecological innovation.



Actions

To obtain these outcomes, FO-RI develops a participatory approach structured around five components, each putting farmers and their organisations on the driving seat of the action-research and innovation. It begun with a short inception phase. Strategic partners (at continental, regional, national and local level include FOs, Agri Agencies and researchers among others) were involved in the different aspects of the implementation. Gender and youth are mainstreamed in all programme related activities.

At the core of the FORI- is a set (13) of Action-Research projects led by FOs with the technical support of agri-agencies and research organisations to design, test and disseminate innovations based on agroecological principles. The projects focus on one or several dimensions of the food system – production, transformation, marketing. To achieve results, the capacities of researchers, farmers and FOs to carry-out experiments and to develop agroecological approaches are strengthened.

Training and local peer-to-peer events on agroecological topics will be organized. Special attention is paid to women and youth participation in decision-making processes at FO level with regards to local experiments. Socio-political conflicts in some countries and food and health crises could be a risk affecting the smooth running of the programme. To address this, close monitoring and evaluation is put in place. Together with the phased planning approach, it allows for regular adjustments to activities and areas of intervention.

Scaling of innovations related to agroecology and agroecological transition will be done through networks of similar programs worldwide. These knowledge sharing effort is built on farmers' own experiences, ideas and knowledge. Capitalisation of relevant experiences within and outside FO-RI are generated and disseminated by FOs, Agri-agencies and AgriCord. This capitalisation process feeds into the advocacy and lobby agenda to engage with policy makers to advance the agroecology agenda. For this purpose, partners from government, international and regional farmer organizations, research institutes attend advocacy events and multi-stakeholder platforms and dialogues.

Results

Social: The capacities of farmers' organisations and farmers to innovate are increased with more productive and resilient farming systems and value chains. With support of research and agri-agencies they make use of their experiences and their knowledge to experiment new agricultural practices, to design new farming systems based on agroecological practices, to negotiate with their environment for access to markets and services. Special attention is given to women and youth.

Environmental: farmers are able to design and manage more diversified farming systems increasing the biodiversity at farm and landscape level, taking care of soil health through better nutrient recycling and better organic matter management at farm and value chain level. Farming systems are more productive and resilient to climate change.

Economic: farmers and farmers' organisations improve the productivity of their farming systems by strengthening ecological processes, limiting the use of external inputs and by participating in value chains and markets with increased added value. New products and new markets are promoted.



Successes and Lessons Learned

The experiments are based on action research approaches, farmer-led innovation methodologies, and farmer to farmer exchanges to share results and lessons. The approaches valorize local knowledge and local capacity.

Strong partnerships are built at local level with farmers, farmers' organizations, agri-agencies and research organizations to ensure the quality of the experiments, to mobilize the scientific expertise, and to monitor resources management

Farmers are in the lead of the process: they steer the project (planning, monitoring and evaluation) with the support of Agricord and agri-agencies, when possible they manage the funds with support of agri-agencies

Advocacy is an important issue to disseminate the results: the project is mobilizing the relevant farmers organizations at national, regional and continental level to support a dialogue with policy makers

Further information on website:

<https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/desira/wiki/fo-ri>