INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS (IFAP): “REPRESENTING FARMER ORGANIZATIONS GLOBALLY”

I. Abstract

IFAP was established in 1946 to bring together nationally representative farmers’ organizations (FOs) to ensure the security of the world’s food supply. IFAP seeks to develop the capacity of farmers, mostly from developing countries, to influence decisions affecting them—at both the domestic and international levels. To facilitate this development, IFAP acts as an international forum where issues of common interest to farmers are highlighted and coordinated plans to address these issues are formulated.

Farmers are represented through regional committees that act as permanent bodies where FOs meet and work together. Meetings, conferences, workshops, and training seminars focusing on capacity-building needs as expressed by FOs are held on a regular basis. A “Standing Committee of Women in Agriculture” facilitates the participation of women farmers in international conferences and workshops. Periodicals, reports, and newsletters provide regular updates on activities undertaken by member organizations as well as disseminate information on diverse topics such as agricultural policy, trade issues, and commodity market trends.

Due to the efforts of IFAP, the 1995 U.N. World Summit for Social Development recognized farmers and FOs as essential elements of civil society. Nevertheless, it is critical that government policies regarding farming be coherent and stable and facilitate the development of agriculture.

II. Background

A large number of farmers living in developing countries comprise some of the poorest sections of society. Mostly unorganized and vulnerable, their voices often go unheard. They have inadequate access to agriculture extension services, reliable input supplies, or marketing services. Lack of information and education further weakens their position. National research agendas and agricultural development policies hardly reflect farmers’ real needs. This situation poses a serious threat to long-term sustainable agriculture systems and in turn to world food security.

Headquartered in Paris, IFAP works to improve the economic and social status of all who live by and on the land, from both developing and developed countries. In pursuit of these goals, IFAP seeks to:

- Promote the creation and strengthening of independent, representative organizations of farmers throughout the world.
- Serve as a forum in which leaders of national FOs can meet to:

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• Highlight mutual interests and take coordinated action to further such interests
• Develop an understanding of world problems
• Exchange information, experiences, and ideas.
• Act as a recognized spokesperson for the world’s farmers, bringing concerns of agricultural producers to the attention of international meetings of governments and other bodies. Some of these bodies include the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (UNFAO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank.
• Keep member organizations informed about international events of concern.

IFAP is financed by voluntary contributions from its member organizations. Any organization that substantially represents farmers at the national level is eligible for membership. Approximately 100 national FOs from 71 countries across the globe constitute IFAP’s present membership. In addition, IFAP also maintains a working relationship with a number of FOs at various stages of development who are not presently members of IFAP.

FOs are represented in four regional committees, namely: African Farmers, Asian Farmers, Mediterranean Farmers, and Farmers from Central America, the Andean Region, and the Caribbean. The Development Cooperation Committee (DCC) is IFAP’s main instrument for building alliances with specialized development agencies to strengthen FOs in developing countries. IFAP promotes the status and position of women farmers through the Standing Committee of Women in Agriculture. This committee is the only worldwide body of women farmers’ representatives.

IFAP works in partnership with governmental and nongovernmental international organizations, along with several agri-agencies and civil society organizations. Some of these international bodies are the International Cooperative Association (ICA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Rodale Institute (U.S.), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the EEC Commission.

III. Impact/Results

The participation and representation of farmers at international events and conferences concerning issues such as water management, agriculture research, rural development, and education, to name a few, has increased. IFAP has aided in the

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2 There can be several member organizations from one country.
3 Figures as of June 2003. Source: www.ifap.org
4 The main roles of DCC are (1) Preparation and formulation of policies with respect to development and development cooperation; and (2) Implementation of policies through a development program. The Development Program seeks to strengthen the representation of farmers from grassroots to the international level, establish partnership agreements with appropriate regional and international bodies, and promote greater coordination of all agricultural and rural development efforts. The program is largely funded by external agencies.
5 Some of the other committees are: Executive Committee, Commodity Groups (Grains and Oilsseeds, Sugar, Tropical Commodities, Dairy Products, etc.), and Standing Committees (Developing Countries, Agricultural Cooperatives, Young Farmers).
international recognition of farmers as important contributors to the global economy. During the 1995 U.N. World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen (Denmark), as a result of IFAP’s efforts, the world’s governments recognized farmers—particularly family farmers and small landholders, both men and women, along with FOs—as essential elements of civil society. The summit officially marked the end of top-down agriculture and the beginning of people-centered development.

In order to strengthen the links between FOs and research institutes, IFAP organized a series of consultations starting in 1989. By the end of 2001, 12 agricultural agencies had confirmed their interest in the coordination of their efforts for the support of farmer organizations in developing countries, and their partnership within the Development Coordination Committee. Projects linking FOs and research institutes have been implemented in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. IFAP has also supported country-level projects and initiatives for organizational strengthening.6 A few such examples are listed below.

- The Philippines National Peasant Caucus (PNPC) was established in October 1996, grouping together the main FOs of the Philippines
- In June 1997, Sanduguan (Small Farmers’ Supreme Council) in the Philippines finalized the conversion of 30 grassroots farmers’ associations into full-fledged cooperatives
- In January 1997, farmers in Burkina Faso relaunched the second phase of their project for consolidating their national-level organization.

Through IFAP, the views and interests of women farmers have been reflected in important intergovernmental documents, such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the FAO/WHO International Conference on Nutrition and The World Food Summit Declaration and Plan of Action for Food Security, to name a few. IFAP was instrumental in the setting up of the annual IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development)/NGOs Consultation, where women’s issues are regularly discussed. Due to the joint efforts of IFAP and other international bodies, October 15 is recognized every year as World Rural Women’s Day by many countries across the globe. The day contributes greatly to the promotion of women farmers and to the dissemination of information on their leading role in society.

In order to address the issue of small farmers and land rights, IFAP initiated work on a policy document titled “Land Issues and Property Rights” in 1999. Issues such as

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6 Projects implemented through direct involvement of IFAP or as technical support to member organizations’ own initiatives, or as initiatives in collaboration with intergovernmental organizations.
8 The International Fund for Agriculture Development, a specialized agency of the U.N., was established in 1977 to finance agricultural development projects primarily for food production in developing countries. Further Links: http://www.ifad.org.
9 The idea of a World Rural Women’s Day to be devoted each year, beginning in 1996, to honor rural women emerged from discussions among representatives of women farmers and rural women in Beijing (July 1995), notably from Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), IFAP, Network of African Rural Women Associations (NARWA), and the Women’s World Summit Foundation (WWSF).
property rights, security of tenure, and compulsory land takeovers are expected to be addressed through a number of reform measures.

In 2000, IFAP entered into a collaborative program with the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR). The program is designed to increase the participation of farmers and Farmers’ Organizations in agricultural research for development through requisite capacity-building activities for FOs. In March 2003, the DCC started formulation of the “Capacity Building for Trade,” a four-year project designed to strengthen the capacity of farmers’ organizations in developing countries in the area of trade.

IV. Key Elements of Empowerment

Information

The IFAP maintains an up-to-date collection of directories of agricultural information sources. The IFAP Documentation and Information Service receives and analyses more than 300 international periodicals from member organizations and other sources covering such diverse topics as agricultural policy, trade issues, commodity market trends and statistics, rural economy and sociology, farming systems, cooperatives, and rural development issues. This keeps the member FOs up-to-date on the latest developments in the field of agriculture at a global level.

In addition, IFAP publishes the following periodicals and reports for improved access of FOs:

- **IFAP Newsletter** presents a quarterly summary and update on the activities undertaken by IFAP and its member organizations.
- **Magazine of the World Farmers Times Foundation** in Zurich, edited by IFAP, outlines and reviews agricultural issues worldwide.
- **World Sugar Farmer News**, the specialized newsletter of the World Association of Sugar Beet and Cane Growers.

Since 1984, IFAP has circulated a development publication series—reference bulletins outlining a basic strategy for FOs based on papers and discussions at IFAP seminars. These publications provide valuable information on development projects, national agricultural pricing policies, commodity marketing, sustainable farming systems, services of farmers’ organizations, and many other topics.

On World Rural Women’s Day, information on the contribution of women farmers is disseminated to the public and rural women themselves through the following mechanisms:

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Some of the reform measures include:

- Increasing access of member organizations to relevant information, skills, and experience on land reform
- Enabling exchange of experiences and know-how among member and contract organizations
- In cases of an ongoing land reform process, exploring possibilities for establishing pilot projects, based on increasing the role of farmers’ organizations in the successful conclusion of such processes.

For more information, see: http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/essd/essedext.nsf/87439322211adf5585256b4f006e3107/7c3a80987d3206aa85256b50005f2b87/SFILE/IFAPLand.pdf.
• Workshops and dialogues with regional and national leaders based on gender and democratization issues, cultural and traditional problems, and the like
• Experience-sharing through visits, to schools, for instance, to give insight into the role of women in agriculture and society
• Posters on the work and lives of rural women
• Agricultural fairs where women exhibit their products and skills.

These outreach activities facilitate better understanding and more accurate perception of rural women in society.

Inclusion/Participation

The governing and operational structure of IFAP incorporates mechanisms to facilitate the active involvement and participation of member organizations that represent farmers at the grassroots level. They are listed as follows:

• The Regional Committees act as a permanent forum where FOs in developing countries meet and work together on a regular basis.
• The participation of women farmers is facilitated through international events, training sessions, workshops, and conferences.
• IFAP’s Development Program is carried out through regular consultative and training seminars, action-research, regional and country projects, and international coordination of farmers’ development efforts and publications. The meetings and workshops focus on priorities for capacity building as expressed by the participating FOs.
• The World Farmers Congress—the General Conference of IFAP—brings together the representatives of member organizations every two years. Among other things, the conference enables member farmers to identify common problems and seek joint solutions to these problems.
• IFAP organizes meetings every six months where members come together to work on one major issue, such as strengthening links between farmers; agricultural research and extension services; farming for sustainable development; and the like.

Local Organizational Capacity

IFAP has been instrumental in bringing together farmers’ organizations from many developing countries and increasing their representation in international events. Issues concerning farmers have been effectively raised and have garnered support from various international bodies. In order to enhance the capacity of farmers to participate and influence decisions at international levels, some of the following capacity-building exercises have been or are in the process of being conducted by IFAP:

• Organizing farmer-to-farmer exchanges on technology of farming, biotechnology, development alternatives, quality of produce, best practices, and farmers’ success stories
• Developing and managing trade operations and other income-generating activities
• Using information technology in all its applications, including organization, management, accountancy, and human resources
• Follow-up and monitoring of agricultural markets of specific commodities (including prices, trading, and quality standards)
• Dynamic organizational development, federation building, profiling, membership, and organizational strengthening and staff training.

Many FOs have undertaken successful poverty-reduction and farmer welfare development activities. A few such initiatives are listed in the text box below.

**Box 2: Successful Poverty Reduction and Welfare Development Activities Undertaken by Farmers’ Organizations**

**NICARAGUA: Union Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG)**
UNAG started its Campesino-to-Campesino (Farmer-to-Farmer) Program in 1992 in Rivas. The program involves extensive training of farmers, from investigating the characteristics of the soil and terrain, to terracing, to learning to make compost heaps, to name a few. By April 1997, more than 600 farmers had received training in the subjects mentioned above and in other areas of farming. As a result, more than 22 irrigation home systems based on wells and simple rope pumps have been set up.

**Uganda Cooperative Alliance (UCA)**
Some of the development programs undertaken by UCA are:

- **The Matching Grant Program:** Approximately 300 primary societies with an average membership of 300 were assisted in projects ranging from grinding mill operations, to construction of stores, to the setting-up of farm supply shops for providing input to farmers.
- **Production Credit to Rural Women:** Through assistance from the Swedish Co-operative Center and the Canadian Co-operative Association, production credit was provided to 836 women in 31 primary societies in six districts in Uganda. Mobilization of credit increased community savings and thereby helped reduce poverty levels.

**Uganda National Farmers’ Association (UNFA)**
A special-interest group within UNFA known as Masindi Seed and Grain Growers Association (MASGGA) procures and sells produce collectively, without the middlemen. Individual farmers do not sell their produce during the harvest time, when the prices are low. Instead, the produce is collected and jointly sold in markets that offer higher prices. Collective marketing has resulted in farmers earning twice as much as they would in selling produce independently at harvest time.

**V. Issues and Lessons**

**Challenges**

Through its Standing Committee of Women in Agriculture, IFAP has encouraged FOs to undertake steps to integrate rural women into their institutional operations and agricultural development policies. However, progress in this direction has been slow.

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11 It is assumed that the above exercises may have helped farmers’ organizations to successfully carry out these ventures.
Technical education and training programs for capacity building among farmers have been relatively lower for women. Training strategies intended specifically for rural women need to be designed and effectively implemented.

Initiatives and programs undertaken by FOs to reduce poverty levels have encountered the following problems:

- Illiteracy, low levels of education, and technical training.
- Inability to reach remote rural areas due to lack of infrastructure facilities.
- Low access to financial resources. Lending institutions like banks require that farmers have land tenure (or similar collateral) to secure credit. Most rural farmers do not have such resources.
- Warfare, political and social instabilities causing mass migration and loss of resources.
- Bureaucratic and inefficient government policies. One such example concerns the Grenada Cane Farmers’ Association (GCFA), a member organization of IFAP. The association built a cane mill on land that was originally leased from the previous government. And although the present government agreed to transfer the land title over to the GCFA, the agreement was never implemented, and the government has not responded to requests to resolve the issue.

**Key Factors for Success**

- It is critical that government policy be coherent and stable, and facilitate the development of agriculture. When the economic and political environments are degrading, capacity building becomes difficult for FOs. In this context, problems such as political interference, social and political instability, and warfare need to be effectively addressed. Easy access to roads, irrigation systems, and market opportunities; public funding for research and development; and farmer-driven taxation and land-credit policies should also be ensured.
- FOs need to be strengthened not only at the grassroots, but also at the local, district, regional, and global levels. Approaches that merely focus on strengthening grassroots farmers’ groups are bound to fail when farmers have no influence on higher-level decisions. The problems of farmers are best articulated by the farmers themselves through their representative organizations.
- It is essential to maintain the initial momentum generated by the World Rural Women’s Day Worldwide Information and Awareness Campaign.
- Attempts should be made to forge partnerships with the media so as to communicate views and information from FOs to other groups and to the general public.

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12 According to the IFAP Millennium Survey on Actions to Reduce Rural Poverty and the Role of Farmers’ Organizations, 2000, many farmers’ organizations place a very high priority (level of priority 85 percent) on the eradication of rural poverty. Several projects and initiatives to reduce poverty were undertaken by farmers’ organizations in Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East, Asia and Central and South America. Further Links: http://www.ifap.org/develop/millensurvey.html.
VI. Further Information: References and World Wide Web Resources

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Web Links


IFAP Home Page. URL: www.ifap.org