

# Working with Farmers and Producer Organizations for Sustainable Agriculture



Photo: World Bank

## **Agriculture is a primary source of food security and income for the 570 million farmers working small plots of land worldwide.**

However, their lives and livelihoods are disrupted by multiple and overlapping stresses and shocks such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a spike in economic instability and conflict.

Evidence shows that smallholder farmers can support their own income and productivity growth when they come together to combine their efforts. Through farmers' or producer organizations, smallholders can improve their market access, broker partnerships, and negotiate better access to inputs and higher prices to sell their produce. They are also able to influence food and related policies, advocate for more favorable credit from financial institutions, and pool resources to invest in communal facilities and innovative farming practices and technologies. Since inception, the **Global Agriculture and Food Security** (GAFSP), has put smallholders front and center.



“I now earn money and contribute to my household income and pay for certain things. In a way, this has also helped me develop a stronger relationship with my husband.”

**Mo Ya from the Hmong ethnic community in northern Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR)**, had raised goats for as long as she could remember. Once she was married, she moved to a new village in the mountainous Xieng Khouang province. There, she could not find goats to raise; raising cattle was much more popular. With little understanding of cattle-raising and few learning opportunities, she thought she would have to rethink income options and adapt to her new surroundings.

Then, in 2017, Mo Ya heard about the **Agriculture for Nutrition Programme (AFN)**, a US\$38.8 million GAFSP-funded project implemented with the Government of Laos with support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The project reached 400 villages in 12 districts across Lao PDR to improve climate-resilient agriculture, household nutrition, and income-generating opportunities. Mo Ya joined a group training to learn new skills, including how smaller livestock, such as goats, can provide more sustainable livelihoods and incur less risk than larger livestock. She now has a flock of 30 goats and has earned more than US\$800, re-investing her income in a new goat enclosure, and in school fees, and building household savings for emergencies.



Photo: Ritik Joshi



## Empowering farmers to transform livelihoods

While GAFSP was initially designed to provide funding to governments and the private sector, it became clear that more direct support was needed for smallholders who were not being reached.

**Representatives of smallholders, from civil society and farmers' organizations, called for change: additional and direct GAFSP support to farmer's organizations, producer organizations, and farmer-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs).**

GAFSP responded by adjusting its operational model. In 2016, GAFSP's launched a pilot that provided small-scale grants to farmers' and producer organizations to lead, design, and implement the most appropriate projects in their local contexts, while working with a development agency of their choice. GAFSP awarded US\$15.9 million in small-scale grants to five pilot projects in Bangladesh, Mali, Senegal, and a regional project in East Africa (Rwanda and Uganda).

Producer organization-led investments provide smallholders with greater ownership, allowing

them to make more effective decisions about their businesses. By coming together and leveraging their collective bargaining power, they are able to forge stronger links among actors along the agriculture value chain, from 'farm to table.' These pilot projects demonstrated that community needs come first when investment is channeled to smallholder farmers, allowing a quicker and efficient response to shocks and crises and a more robust recovery.

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MALI

SENEGAL

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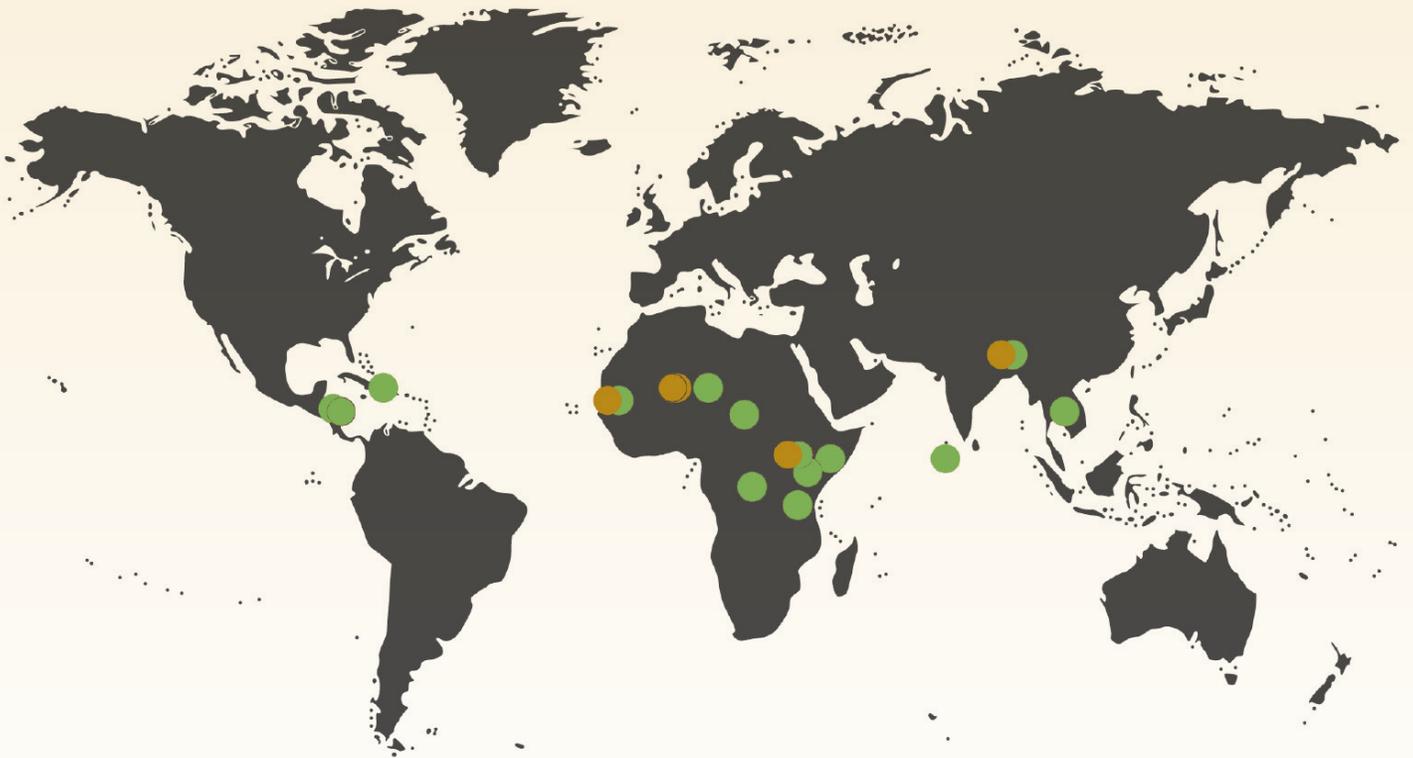
RWANDA

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Five years after launching and learning from the pilot, in December 2021, GAFSP allocated close to **US\$30 million to 12 projects designed and led by producer organizations.** These projects will

strengthen the institutional capacities of these organizations as key economic players in their local agricultural and food systems.

## Producer Organization-led Projects



- MMI pilot projects  
Bangladesh, Mali,  
Senegal, East Africa  
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- Producer Organization-led projects  
Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, Democratic  
Republic of Congo, Haiti, Honduras, Maldives,  
Nicaragua, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda,

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**When COVID-19 hit Bangladesh, Rita Brommo was concerned about how the global pandemic would impact her farming community.** In addition to the health concerns, there was anxiety about hunger and the ability to generate income. Without being able to move around to sell produce, how would she and other farmers be able to earn enough money to put food on the table?

Before the pandemic, the Sara Bangla Krishak Society, a national network of 55 Farmers’ Organizations of which Rita is a member, had already been supported with funding from GAFSP’s pilot initiative, which has reached more than 10,000 people across Bangladesh, more than half of them women. The pilot project linked farmers directly with new, profitable market opportunities and provided a grant of US\$15,000–20,000 to farmers’ organizations to develop sustainable

enterprises, providing technical expertise and business development training.

As a result of GAFSP’s long-term funding for the project, Farmers’ Organizations in Bangladesh were more prepared when the pandemic hit. The Sara Bangla Krishak Society responded to the crisis by setting up 57 Virtual Call

Centers, equipping farmers with information to respond to the crisis. Through the virtual call centers, SBKS received up to 200 calls per day. Equipped with the phone numbers of collaborators across the agricultural value chain, they matched buyers with sellers and managed delivery of materials farmers may need to keep up farm production, like seeds or fertilizer. The society also has a network of rickshaw drivers who safely deliver items or pick up produce.

In reflecting on this experience, Rita said: “I want to say only one thing to the farmers: let’s be united first. Then there will be more hands to lend, and we will have more power. With more power, we can face any challenge that comes.” Smallholder farmers can amplify their voices through producer organizations, sharing and solving problems through increased resources.

What's most striking about these new projects is the priorities that producer organizations have chosen for themselves: a focus on adapting to and mitigating the negative impacts of climate change; an emphasis on women and young people's participation; a forward-looking vision to address the medium- to long-term response to COVID-19; and a conviction that local agriculture and food systems must be strengthened.

At GAFSP, we realize that empowerment is complex and that smallholder farmers' agency is multifaceted. **Smallholders are entrepreneurs, innovators, transformers, conservers, adapters, and thought leaders.** GAFSP will be expanding its support to improve the lives and livelihoods of smallholder farmers, their families, and communities.

“The producer organization-led modality has created opportunities for smallholder farmers to organize themselves and federate at the national level. When organized, they can respond better to external shocks, increase their market power, and be more involved in the value chain – rather than being mere producers and price takers. Moreover, farmers, with the support of many development partners, are becoming more credible, trustworthy, and capable to engage other partners in the business of overcoming hunger and poverty and promoting sustainable food systems.”



**Esther Penunia**  
Secretary General of the Asian  
Farmers' Association for Sustainable  
Rural Development (AFA)



## About GAFSP

Launched by the G20 in the wake of the global response to the 2007-08 food crisis, the **Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP)** is a US\$2 billion multilateral financing platform dedicated to improving food and nutrition security by building sustainable agricultural systems in the world's poorest countries.

In line with Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), GAFSP supports smallholder farmers and their families by strengthening sustainable and resilient agriculture and food systems. Since 2010, GAFSP has provided a range of financial and technical resources – grants, concessional loans, blended finance, technical assistance, and advisory services – to projects along the entire agriculture value chain, from 'farm to table'. These funds are delivered through partnerships with multilateral development agencies and private sector actors with presence and expertise on the ground.

GAFSP investments are about more than just ending food and nutrition insecurity; they help reduce hunger, create jobs and income, reduce poverty and stress on the environment and respond to climate change. Working in partnership with donors, countries, civil society organizations, and development agencies, GAFSP has helped improve the lives of more than 16 million people, including nearly 7 million women, worldwide.



# GAFSP

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