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Agroecology and  
Safe Food System  
Transitions

# Reflection on co-creation: what works and what does not

Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development

April 3, 2025

# Lessons and insights from global and local initiatives of AFA and members



The co-creation of the vision and research direction was achieved because the resources were distributed among all partners allowing each partner to collect information from their respective constituencies. This set up allowed AFA to prepare and bring something to the table.

**Asia-Pacific Manifesto for a New Vision of Research and Innovation Systems  
to Support Forgotten Foods**

Since many years in the past the Asia-Pacific countries have been growing and consuming a wide variety of food crops, which had high nutrition value. However, with change in food habits over the past years many have moved away from those traditional foods which have now become almost a forgotten food. Our agri-food system is now characterized by a limited number of (major) staple crops, like rice, maize, wheat, soybean and potatoes, which make up 60 % of the global food energy intake and unsustainable farming practices. Formal agricultural research systems often tend to neglect many local crops and foods, considering vast diversity of over 30,000 edible plant species of which 6,000 have been used as food with 700 cultivated throughout human history. These species have demonstrated multiple environmental, economic and social benefits, in particular to the fragile, marginalized and vulnerable local communities and ecosystems.

Currently, our agri-food system is off course if it is to sustainably nourish a growing population on a hotter planet while sustaining the Earth's capital of biodiversity and natural resources upon which it depends. Its outputs are increasingly delivering calorie-dense foods, responsible for a triple burden of malnutrition (obesity, undernourishment, food insecurity). Its governance is not multi-stakeholder driven. In a vicious circle, current food systems are responsible for 30% of Green House Gases emission, as well as significant land degradation, making the production of current major food crops depending on increasingly impoverished soils and even more vulnerable to climate change, while susceptible to growing pests and

**Asia-Pacific Farmers' Declaration**  
On Traditional and Indigenous Food Crops  
May 28, 2021

We, the participating organizations in the survey conducted between March - May 2021 on Traditional and Indigenous Crops, as a preparatory process to the Regional Consultation on Forgotten Foods organized by the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), Global Forum of Agricultural Research (GFAR), Alliance Bioversity - CIAT, Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Barli Development Institute for Rural Women (BDIRW) and International Crop Research Institute for Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT), appreciate the attention given to traditional and indigenous food crops that we, with our ancestors, have cultivated for generations. We know that many of these crops are nutritious and can readily provide for our families' need for food, fiber, health, medicines and occasionally incomes. We also use our indigenous crops for religious activities and for traditional and local festivals. We understand well that these crops have thrived in our soil, even in marginal areas, with little inputs, and withstanding adverse conditions. Thus, these crops have been conserved by our communities, especially by our women farmers. We have relied on traditional and existing practices – our own knowledge, family's tacit knowledge and fellow farmers' knowledge - to grow, consume and sell these crops. We have been developing resource management approaches that help conserve agrobiodiversity and ways to process and market these crops. Our work on local indigenous crops is a testimony to the role of family farmers as custodians of our country's agrobiodiversity and caretakers of the environment. Our communities are rich repositories of diverse species, wisdom and knowledge.

### Salient features of the proposed collective action

The Collective Action (CA) on Forgotten Food is a response to the global call to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to recommit to a more inclusive process that "leaves no one behind". It is envisioned that capitalizing on the untapped potential of science, technology, and innovation, while putting farmers, especially women, in the driving seat of the Action, can potentially result in multiple impacts beyond this initiative.

**i) Co-creation:** A co-designed action, allowing thousands of stakeholders (including farmers, researchers, industry, and governments) representing different views and knowledge systems, to collaborate, and mobilize their resources and ingenuity. Building on the initial work in India, the CA will mobilize stakeholders in at least 7 countries of 5 regions.

**ii) A new approach to forgotten foods and neglected underutilised species (FF/NUS):** Valorising the contributions of forgotten foods and NUS towards resilience, food security, and improved nutrition. Showcasing pathways for supporting food systems and agroecology transition, building on local knowledge and capacities. A pathway to strengthen farmer-managed seed systems leading to agrobiodiversity conservation and climate adaptation.

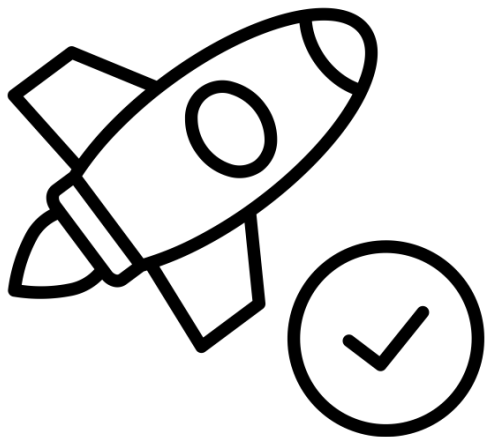
**iii) Game changer of agricultural innovation and research systems:**

Mainstreaming and scaling out farmer-led innovation that will lead to a transformation of research governance and approaches, spearheading new replicable models of partnerships and inclusive processes.

**iv) Pro-poor value chain development:** Ensuring that throughout the generation of value, poor smallholder farmers, particularly women, remain in control of the benefits from the development of new business models (e.g. public-private - producer partnership) and incentive mechanisms (financial or non-financial), the creation of new enterprises, and mainstreaming of FF/NUS.

Box 1. Features of the proposed initiative

The outcomes and impacts were evident for AFA regional staff and farmers who were involved in the perception survey. NUS/FF are crops that are within the control of farmers and improvements from production to market linkaging will clearly benefit and empower farmers, especially women farmers.



Created by Orange Cat  
from Noun Project

*Drawing from our engagements in the recent years, we realized that:*

Readiness of all partners and effective facilitation are essential components for co-creation or participatory innovation development to take-off.

It should not be assumed that all partners are ready to collaborate and share resources. Laying the groundwork is important before everyone comes together.

Mostly it is either farmer-led or research-led



### Improving rice production system in Louangpabang province in Lao PDR through participatory research and learning



- Among the main challenges in conducting community-based participatory research and learning that requires field testing and trial was convening farmers in a common venue and at a common time because it coincides with the rice production season and farmers don't have extra time for other activities. One of the solutions employed was agreeing on the most appropriate time, for example full moon date when everyone go back home and don't work for a long period during the day or early morning or evening for meetings.
- There were also instances where in farmers hesitated to test and employ new practices in their own field because of the losses experienced by other farmers. Thus, it is important to integrate ways to compensate losses incurred by farmers or that the trial can be done in small-scale initially before applied in the entire field.

**Research partnerships between farmers' association, academic institutions and development agencies: The case of KAFLU in Kyrgyzstan**



## Recognition of FO capacity and reach

KAFLU collaborated with the Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences to jointly undertake project interventions that include research activities and translating the research findings to guide small farmers, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and as a basis for advisory services.

The capacity of small-scale producers and agri-food MSMEs within project regions has been bolstered to effectively voice their interests in national-level policy-making. This progress culminated in the creation of an online info-trade portal, employing a gender-balanced and participatory approach to support smallholder farmers.



## Enablers based on experiences of national FOs

- Capacity
- Relevance
- Demand making capacity
- Working with existing structures or groups in the villages
- Openness
- Support institutions (NGOs) providing capacity development
- FOs has resources



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