

Innovations in linking sustainable agricultural practices with markets

CALL FOR CASE-STUDY PROPOSALS

Rationale:

Producing more with less by increasing efficiency and improving ecosystem services is the core concept of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) new paradigm for sustainable agricultural production, synthesized in the book "Save and Grow" (FAO, 2011). FAO's new paradigm is built upon lessons learned from the Green Revolution, taking into account its benefits and drawbacks. Intensive crop production helped to reduce the number of undernourished and drive rural development. But those achievements came at a high cost. In many countries, decades of intensive cropping have degraded fertile land and depleted groundwater, provoked pest upsurges, eroded biodiversity, and polluted air, soil and water. However, as the world population rises to 9.2 billion in 2050 there is no choice but to further intensify agricultural production, in a context where the yield growth rate of major cereal crops is declining, along with an increasing competition for land and water, rising fuel and fertilizer prices, and the impacts of climate change.

Fortunately, over the years convincing evidence has accumulated indicating that agricultural production can be intensified in a sustainable manner. For example, integrated pest management (IPM) reduces use of synthetic pesticides and improves natural biological pest control as an ecosystem service. These and other sustainable agricultural practices are slowly spreading, sometimes thanks to voluntary standards for sustainability; but it is clear that there is a need to increase and improve the provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner.¹

How do farmers and organizations move towards more sustainable practices? What are the motivations and driving forces for them to do so?

Among the range of incentives that might motivate farmers to adopt more sustainable practices, we focus here on the role that **markets** could play in the transition towards sustainable intensification. Policy pressures to propose 'climate-smart' agricultural solutions and the rise of consumer demand for "sustainable" products (e.g. organic, fair trade, 'green' labels) have created market outlets for sustainable food, textiles and energy in developed countries. This demand has provided opportunities for some commercial producers in lesser developed countries (LDCs) to become included in global value chains for sustainable products (e.g., FAO, 2008, 2013). But are global value chains the only market incentive for producers in developing countries to adopt sustainable practices? What are other market mechanisms that link sustainable practices with markets?

¹ We refer to the Brundtland definition of sustainable development that focuses on the three pillars of social, economic and environmental sustainability in order to meet the needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations.

Over the recent years, a number of innovations in business models, value chain organization, institutional arrangements and farmer support services in LDCs have been recognized as possibly providing incentives to producers in developing countries for increasing food production using sustainable practices and improving the provision of sustainable goods to local consumers (FAO, 2010, 2012a, b). One of the most wide-spread innovations is the emergence of new institutional and market intermediaries who take on a wider range of roles in linking farmers with markets for their produce. These intermediaries are part of local infrastructural and institutional environments and include a range of organizations that provide support to producers to learn sustainable techniques and market sustainably produced products and services. For example, we find evidences of participatory guarantee systems (PGS), marketing cooperatives, training centres, private traders or local public procurement that fill these roles.

These examples suggest that the strengthening of local infrastructure and institutions are important for enabling small and medium producers and enterprises in LDCs to increase their share of value for sustainably produced products. However, a gap remains in the literature on these innovations in LDCs and particularly on how successful they are in promoting the adoption of sustainable practices.

To fill this gap, FAO is initiating a survey of innovative institutional approaches that enable markets in developing countries to act as incentives for the adoption of sustainable practices. To that end, this call for proposals is an invitation for detailed case studies on **innovative approaches (public, private and/or civil society) designed to link sustainable crop production practices with local markets for sustainable products in developing countries**.

The papers that respond to this call should try to answer the following questions:

1. What is the innovative institutional approach and where is it taking place (in which country/market)?
2. What types of sustainable practices are being promoted, who is promoting them and why are they considered to be sustainable?
3. What are the motivations, driving forces, incentives and triggers for farmers to adopt sustainable practices?
4. What role do markets (and consumer demand) play in the local transition towards sustainable agricultural practices?
5. What are the enabling institutional environments that have provided the opportunity for innovative initiatives to emerge?

Request for proposals:

Individuals or organizations interested in developing case studies of innovative approaches to link sustainable farming to markets in developing countries are requested to submit a detailed abstract, maximum 1000 words, outlining the following:

- Identify and describe in detail the sustainable practices, products and approaches (environmentally, socially, economically) which the organization or group promotes, e.g.

Integrated Pest Management, no-tillage, organic, ecological, conservation agriculture, integrated production systems, low carbon, energy use, waste management and recycling, fair prices, community management, smallholder agriculture, decent work, etc.

- Identify and describe briefly the incentive(s) which encourage the adoption of sustainable practices by farmers, e.g. pricing, standard, label, certification, brand, subsidy, tax incentives, preferential channels, policy or community commitments
- Identify and describe briefly the consumers/buyers, their motivation to purchase, their requirements for sustainable products
- Identify and describe briefly the supporting institutions, intermediaries or network, e.g. history of the organization, stakeholders, main activities, particularities of the geographic location
- Provide a brief appraisal of the approach explaining how it is innovative, what the incentives are for the adoption of sustainable practices and the potential lessons about linking sustainable production to markets for sustainably produced products and services.

Submission requirements and deadlines:

Extended abstracts (maximum 1000 words) should be submitted in **English, French or Spanish** to Anne-Sophie Poisot (AnneSophie.Poisot@fao.org), Allison Loconto (allison.loconto@fao.org), and Pilar Santacoloma (Pilar.Santacoloma@fao.org).

Submissions should include a separate title page with the authors' name and contact information to help in the review of the proposals. Professionals from developing countries and LDCs are encouraged to participate. Proposals from individuals directly involved with the innovative approaches are highly encouraged.

Proposals will be evaluated according to the following selection criteria:

- Relevance of the case to the request for proposals
- Quality of the proposal
- Time that the innovative approach has been in use (preferably more than two years)
- Author's institutional affiliation, with preference given to those directly linked to the implementers of the innovative approach

Ten successful candidates (individuals or organizations) will be invited to further elaborate their case fully in a 6 000 word paper for which they will receive a nominal contribution of USD 2 000. The selected cases will be published in a FAO publication. During a follow-up stage, the successful candidates will collaborate with FAO project coordinators to elaborate their cases and a follow-up field visit to the case study organizations will be organized by FAO in order to gain further insight into the cases.

Important dates:

- Submission of abstract proposal (max 1000 words): **6 October 2013**
- Notification of accepted abstracts: **25 October 2013**

- Provision of further case-study development guidelines: **25 October 2013**
- Submission of the complete case-study: **25 November 2013**
- Notification of publication and of field follow-up visit: **15 January 2014**

References

- FAO. 2008. *Certification in the value chain for fresh fruits: The example of banana industry*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- . 2010. *Enhancing farmers' access to markets for certified products: A comparative analysis using a business model approach*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- . "Impact of voluntary standards on smallholder market participation in developing countries. Literature study." Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- . 2012a. *Innovative policies and institutions to support agro-industries development*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- . 2012b. *Smallholder business models for agribusiness-led development: Good practice and policy guidance*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.