



Collective Organisation Maturity Evaluation Tool (COMET)

A toolkit for forest and farm producer organisations

Duncan Macqueen

April 2026

About the author

Duncan Macqueen, senior researcher, IIED


Corresponding author: duncan.macqueen@iied.org

Published by IIED, April 2026

Macqueen, DJ (2026) Collective Organisation Maturity Evaluation Tool (COMET): a toolkit for forest and farm producer organisations. IIED, London.

International Institute for Environment and Development
44 Southampton Buildings, London WC2A 1AP, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
www.iied.org

 www.linkedin.com/company/iied

 www.facebook.com/theIIED

Read more publications at iied.org/publications

IIED publications may be shared and republished in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). Under the terms of this licence, anyone can copy, distribute and display the material, providing that they credit the original source and don't use it for commercial purposes or make derivatives. Different licences may apply to some illustrative elements, in which instance the licence will be displayed alongside. IIED is happy to discuss any aspect of further usage. Get more information via www.iied.org/about-publications

Cover photo: a tree nursery run by a forest and farm producer organisation, Kenya. Credit: Duncan Macqueen/IIED

IIED is a charity registered in England, Charity No.800066 and in Scotland, OSCR Reg No.SC039864 and a company limited by guarantee registered in England No.2188452.

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
1. Why assess an organisation's maturity?	5
2. Guiding principles	6
2.1 Main objectives	6
2.2 What degrees of maturity are assessed?	6
2.3 What areas of organisational functionality are assessed?	6
3. Scoring method	8
3.1 Scoring areas of organisational functionality	8
3.2 Reaching an overall score for organisational maturity	8
3.3 Using the scores in decision making	8
4. Assessment diagram and improvement plan	9
4.1 Overall score and assessment diagram	9
4.2 Stocktake and improvement plan	10

Acknowledgements

This toolkit was prepared for the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF), a partnership of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), AgriCord and IIED. The FFF has worked since 2012 to strengthen forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) as key change agents to deliver climate-resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods. As this work has progressed, multi-year support to FFPOs has raised the question of how to assess their progress in attaining organisational maturity, how FFPOs can avoid programme dependency and how (or if) FFF should decide when FFPOs should exit programme support.

The author is grateful to Ewald Rametsteiner and Sophie Grouwels of FAO for prioritising the need for this maturity assessment tool. Sincere thanks also go to FFF facilitators Virginia Vallejo Rojas (Ecuador) and Philip Kisoyan (Kenya) for sharing the maturity assessment models they had developed for FFF Ecuador and FFF Kenya respectively.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Lukas Hadasch and Katja Vuori of AgriCord and Lany Rebagay, Leo Mendoza, and Chiara Pandela of the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA) for sharing their Farmers Enterprise Assessment Tool towards Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Agri-based Enterprise (FEAT to RISE).

Sincere thanks go to Stephen Mwangi of IIED for allowing me to draw on his work on the Governance Enhancement Tactics — Self Assessment Tool (GET-SET) that also points towards mature organisational structures.

Finally, I would also like to thank Femy Pinto of the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP) for sharing their maturity assessment PowerPoint guidance.

The intention is that COMET is piloted as a draft assessment tool to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the maturity level of an organisation across a number of areas of functionality. This toolkit is not intended as an 'exit strategy' tool to assess when FFPOs have reached a level of maturity when they no longer need programme support from the FFF. On the contrary, retaining mature FFPOs within FFF programmes offers many benefits, as they can play a strategic role in delivering impact over the longer term.

1. Why assess an organisation's maturity?

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) programme wishes to pilot an organisational maturity evaluation process for collective organisations such as forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) that are currently supported by the FFF.

The evaluation process will measure the progress these FFPOs have made in gaining organisational maturity. It aims to inform interested parties of the degree to which organisations indicated for support have made progress towards being mature or 'able to stand on their own feet' with or without further FFF financial support. This does not necessarily mean that the FFF will not provide further financial support to mature FFPOs, as they can act as key agents of transformative change, and there may be very good reasons for funding mature groups. But it does ensure that any further support is provided in an informed manner, cognisant of which level of maturity that FFPO has reached. This toolkit can also be used to assess progress towards organisational maturity in other programmes and projects.

The purpose of the Collective Organisation Maturity Evaluation Tool (COMET) is to try and provide a **quick and easy assessment of organisational maturity with credible accuracy**. COMET draws on key indicators to assess maturity in the following five key areas: internal organisational governance, environmental sustainability, business development, financial management and social inclusion.

It should be noted that COMET is not a comprehensive FFF tool to develop capability in the five areas of organisational maturity. If you want to use a toolkit that gives much more comprehensive guidance to help FFPOs develop areas of organisational maturity, there are many excellent examples, such as the Farmers Enterprise Assessment Tool towards Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Agri-based Enterprise (FEAT to RISE) facilitated by AgriCord and its alliance members, alongside the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA) and La Via Campesina (LVC).¹ For further comprehensive guidance on the elements of organisational maturity covered within this toolkit, see for example:

- **Internal organisational governance:** Mwangi, S and Macqueen, D (2025) Governance Enhancement Tactics — Self-Evaluation Tool. IIED, London. www.iied.org/22653iied
- **Environmental sustainability:** Macqueen, D (2021) Diversification for climate resilience. Thirty options for forest and farm producer organisations. IIED, London. www.iied.org/20311iied
- **Business development:** Boscolo, M, Lehtonen, P and Pra, A (2021) Developing bankable business plans: a learning guide for forest producers and their organizations. FAO, Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cb4520en>
- **Financial management:** Heney, J (2000) Enhancing Farmers' Financial Management Skills. Rural Finance & Investment Learning Centre. www.rfilc.org/library/enhancing-farmers-financial-management-skills
- **Social inclusion:** Bolin, A and Macqueen, D (2019) How forest and farm producer organisations deliver social and cultural services. IIED, London. www.iied.org/17704iied

¹ For details, contact Adrian Monge Monge at adrian.mongemonge@ffd.fi

2. Guiding principles

2.1 Main objectives

This assessment process should be useful both to those providing support (such as FFF facilitators) and those receiving support (FFPOs). Assessing the maturity of FFPOs can be time intensive and is an inevitably imprecise science. As such, COMET aims to reduce to an absolute minimum both the **degrees of maturity** to be assessed (see Section 2.2) and the key areas of **organisational functionality** within which maturity is assessed (see Section 2.3). To this end, the COMET assessment tool has been developed to be:

- **Pragmatic** and useful to both FFF facilitators (both in terms of assessing initial organisational maturity status or tracking progress as FFPOs gain maturity over time) and to FFPOs (in terms of being informative about useful capabilities they need to develop going forward)
- **Precise** and comprehensive (providing a snapshot of organisational maturity), and
- **Efficient** (by minimising as far as is possible overcomplexity or redundancy).

2.2 What degrees of maturity are assessed?

We have adopted, alongside a zero baseline, three main states of maturity (considering two to be imprecise, but four to be overly complex). In the several maturity assessment methods that we have reviewed, it has seemed impossible to develop a binary classification (mature or immature). There are simply too many areas of functionality and indicators of maturity for that to be possible. But inflating the number of maturity categories also makes the differences between them difficult to distinguish. We therefore propose the following maturity categories:

- **Nascent (baseline):** isolated individual producers with little formal collective action beyond traditional authority structures
- **Emergent:** ad hoc producer groups in the initial stages of defining their objectives and how to deliver them sustainably
- **Advancing:** formalising producer groups that have planned structures, operational policies and operational practices but without tested delivery, and
- **Mature:** professionalised producer groups with well-tested structures, policies and practices that are delivering members' objectives sustainably.

It is apparent that for an organisation to qualify for FFF support at all, it probably has already moved above the zero baseline. Nevertheless, we have retained the zero baseline in order to cater for other programmes or projects that might be offering support to facilitate the formation of groups.

2.3 What areas of organisational functionality are assessed?

For efficiency's sake, we have tried to keep to a minimum the core the areas of FFPO functionality to be assessed. Collective organisations are set up by their members to serve the objectives of those members. Initially this may involve 'start-up' investment in members' resources and time that are unrecompensed. Yet the expectation in a mature organisation is that belonging to it will be both 'worth it' and 'sustainable'. By this we mean that ongoing investments in members' resources and time will be 'repaid' by the organisation in services delivered that match the members' objectives and are sustained without further unrecompensed 'start-up' investments. Organisational maturity can therefore be assessed by

checking with members the degree to which this is the case. For FFPOs, there are also important environmental dimensions of sustainable land use that must be assessed.

Therefore, COMET examines five key elements of organisational functionality to provide a pragmatic, precise and efficient means of assessing maturity:

- **Organisational governance and relationships:** how an organisation is structured and run and how it works with others. It includes who leads, how decisions are made, how work is checked, and making sure the organisation follows rules and standards.
- **Environmental management and sustainability:** the degree to which an organisation can help its members plan and manage natural resources in ways that are climate-resilient, regenerative and fair. This involves issues of biodiversity management, environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience.
- **Economic entrepreneurship and viability:** the degree to which business groups form, research and develop viable value propositions and management structures, and invest in production qualities and efficiencies in ways that ensure profitability. This involves issues of market analysis, value creation and customer segmentation, attraction and retention.
- **Financial transparency accountability:** the degree to which monetary resources are managed transparently and deployed accountably and efficiently towards objectives. This involves issues of financial management, including the planning, control and analysis of income and expenditure, cash flow, profit and loss, and return on investment. It also includes the management of savings and loans funds on behalf of members.
- **Social inclusion, protection and solidarity:** the degree to which everyone (women and men, youth and the elderly, ethnic groups) is treated fairly, and feels included and supported — especially people who are often left out. It covers how members' rights are respected, how people can take part in decisions, and how benefits are shared so the whole community can thrive.

3. Scoring method

This section should be read alongside the accompanying assessment framework, available at: bit.ly/iied-comet, which includes templates for completing the COMET assessment.

3.1 Scoring areas of organisational functionality

For each of the five areas of organisational functionality, we present five indicator questions to assess maturity, each with four possible states that can be scored from 1 to 4 (see Step 1 in the assessment framework). The assessment can be made internally as a self-assessment, or by external reviewer such as a member of an apex organisation, a project facilitator or a paid consultant. Ideally, an evaluator would first conduct an initial baseline assessment using the toolkit, and then after a period of support, the same evaluator (for consistency's sake) would conduct a progress assessment.

Whoever chooses to do the baseline or progress assessment should convene a meeting with several members of the organisation (including some in leadership positions) and then interview those people. The process is to ask each of the indicator questions, and then discuss with the group which response is closest to the actual situation for that organisation. Once agreement is reached, the closest response should be ticked and a numerical score equal to that response placed in the 'sum' column.

Once all five indicator questions have been agreed for an area of organisational maturity, the figures in the sum column can be totalled to give a score. The highest possible total score for each area of organisational functionality is 20. An evaluator can also record qualitative observations about the maturity of each area of functionality.

3.2 Reaching an overall score for organisational maturity

Once the five areas of organisational functionality have been scored (each out of 20), the five totals can be summed to give a score out of 100. This also means that the final maturity scores can be expressed as a percentage, providing further insights on areas of organisational functionality which are strong or weak.

To show visually which areas of an organisation are strong or weak, the final step is to enter the scores for each of the five areas of organisational functionality into a spider diagram (see Section 4).

3.3 Using the scores in decision making

The scores and spider diagram give a snapshot of an organisation's maturity at a given moment. An assessment can be done at the start of a programme support process to set a baseline, and again at the end to show progress.

If a programme such as FFF wants to eventually 'graduate' (phase out) an FFPO from its support programme, it must decide which aspects of organisational strength matter most and what minimum scores are needed. These choices are not simple — even when the goal is only to strengthen the organisation itself.

Extra care is needed when graduation is tied to achieving external results (such as income gains or restored forest and farmland), not just internal improvements. In such cases, more mature FFPOs may be the ones that offer most benefit or impact from continued support, rather than being phased out.

4. Assessment diagram and improvement plan

4.1 Overall score and assessment diagram

Once you have scored the five areas of organisational functionality in Step 1 in the assessment framework (each out of 20), the five totals can be summed to give a score out of 100. The final maturity scores can also be expressed as a percentage (up to 100%), providing further insights on areas of organisational functionality which are strong or weak. Add the overall score percentage to the box at the top of Step 2 in the assessment framework.

Next, enter the scores for each of the five areas of organisational functionality into a spider diagram (see Step 2 in the assessment framework). The diagram helps to show which areas of your organisation are strong or weak. Together, the scores and spider diagram give a snapshot of your organisation's maturity at a given moment. Figure 1 gives an example of a completed spider diagram. .

Figure 1. Example of a completed spider diagram



4.2 Stocktake and improvement plan

From the interview process and discussions about, and scores for, each area of organisational maturity, using the space provided in Step 3 of the assessment framework, create a stocktake and improvement plan that describes your organisation's priority areas for improvement.

- If this is a **baseline assessment** at the start of a support programme, the improvement plan could include areas of support to be provided by the support programme within the agreed budget for that programme with the aim of enhancing performance in any of the areas indicated.
- If this is a **final assessment** of support already given, this could include some stocktake or commentary on the progress that was made due to the support provided, and any areas that the FFPO management are committed to improving over the next year going forward (with or without further resourcing).