



FREE STATE UMBRELLA FPA VRYSTAAT SAMBREEL BBV

IFDX 2025 Participation: Outcomes and Response

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The Free State Umbrella Fire Protection Association (FSUFPA) participated in IFDX 2025.

Prior to IFDX, FSUFPA assumed that international participation needed to be channelled through official structures. Post-IFDX, we recognise that direct participation and collaboration are both feasible and encouraged within the international wildfire community. The access achieved through IFDX—combined with FSUFPA's frontline experience in Community-Based Fire Management (CBFiM) and Integrated Fire Management (IFM), locally and in other African countries—provides FSUFPA with a clear operational understanding of the sustainability gap in wildfire management across Sub-Saharan and Southern African rural communities.

Wildfire Management in Africa

Multiple programmes across Sub-Saharan and Southern Africa have shown that CBFiM/IFM works in practice, demonstrating operational feasibility across different governance settings and fuel types. Well-documented CBFiM and IFM projects in Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia delivered positive results in rural tropical and subtropical grasslands, savannas, woodlands, and shrublands.

Independent reviews consistently show that well-run wildfire pilots and CBFiM/IFM projects in Sub-Saharan Africa deliver clear gains during implementation but struggle to persist once external leadership and funding end. The core reasons are weak institutional anchors, limited recurrent budgets, and thin exit strategies. Evaluations further identify chronic gaps in institutional backing, financing, and technical support as recurring constraints to long-term delivery. In short, CBFiM is inherently a long-term, participatory process that requires political commitment and well-defined roles; without permanent support structures beyond the project window, communities are over-burdened and hard-won improvements erode. Repeated findings point to the same root causes: projects hinge on a small cadre of donor-funded leaders; when they demobilise, recurrent budgets, institutional mandates, and maintenance schedules are insufficient to carry the gains.

Structural and Coordination Failures

Official channels in Southern Africa rarely deliver usable information and support: long-discussed fire policies and structures remain largely unimplemented; SADC's regional fire management guidance and cross-border frameworks are not operationalised. The Southern Africa Fire Network (SAFNet)—formerly the region's main bridge between managers and researchers—has effectively ceased functioning. In practical terms, a key channel for shared methods, training, and data exchange has been removed. Practitioners revert to ad-hoc contacts and social channels for decision support, undermining standardisation and institutional memory.

Together, these failures choke knowledge flow and stunt capacity building—leaving practitioners dependent on ad-hoc networks and start-and-stop projects, without the regional architecture that was supposed to support them. The result is a widening gap between policy intent and field delivery.



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The Rural Africa Fire Alliance (RAFA)

Combining our IFDX experience with our work training rural CBFiM teams in South Africa, helping to stand up broader IFM structures that support them, and staff participation in wildfire projects in Rwanda and Zambia, we are establishing a trans-boundary African wildfire NGO to turn proven CBFiM/IFM practice into durable, scalable systems. The Rural Africa Fire Alliance will support CBFiM/IFM projects through the following:

- Establish a knowledge hub and practitioner network.
- Facilitate mutual learning opportunities—including practical exchanges like the Great Feral Burn-off.
- Develop sustainable funding mechanisms.
- Deliver targeted capacity building.
- Coordinate with international partners and stakeholders so CBFiM remains supported by robust IFM structures.

Conclusion

IFDX 2025 removed the perceived gate and clarified that knowledge sharing and networking across borders and institutions is not only desirable but crucial. CBFiM/IFM deliver results across Sub-Saharan and Southern Africa, but sustaining those results requires a stable collaborative platform that provides mechanisms for continued development. The Rural Africa Fire Alliance is our practical response: a lean, cross-border backbone that turns proven methods into sustained outcomes through a knowledge hub, mutual learning (e.g., the Great Feral Burn-off), capacity building, and interoperable IFM support. We are moving from sporadic projects to a reliable system that protects communities, livelihoods, and landscapes in rural Africa well beyond the grant cycle.