EXPERIENCE IN MALAWI
Caesar Kachale – (caesar.kachale@fao.org)

Along the shores of Lake Malawi, lies a popular tourist district Mangochi. This is a fishing livelihood. HIV/AIDS prevalence and subsequently number of orphans ranks high, no wonder it has 4 of the 8 JFFLS sites in Malawi.

The JFFLS are established at selected schools in the fishing community. A lot of the male ex-pupils of the schools in this area are fishermen or fish mongers. Girls marry at a young age. Most of them stay within the communities.

The first discussion on the JFFLS concept was done in November 2006. This was attended by government ministries namely: Education and vocational training; Agriculture and food security; and Gender and social welfare. UN agencies had FAO, UNICEF and WFP. These meetings were facilitated by FAO in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Vocational training.

Selecting JFFLS facilitators:

The first discussion on the JFFLS concept was done in November 2007. A district level meeting was attended by heads of district education, agriculture and the district executive offices. Later, community level meetings were mobilized in collaboration with the district heads. These discussions targeted local and religious leaders, school heads and teachers, Parents and teacher association representatives and prominent people like business people and community contributors. This happened at each of the JFFLS sites and school catchments.

Finally community meetings were organized in collaboration with the district and area leaders targeting the JFFLS site and school catchments communities. 8 meetings on average occurred per site.

The JFFLS concept, approach and implementation in general formed the basis in these discussions. Issues of the JFFLS sites’ cultural, social, economic, health, agriculture in line the JFFLS approach were also chatted about.

After the mobilization meetings outlined above, each JFFLS catchments site came up with a JFFLS committee. 10 community members were selected based on their knowledge of issues and contributions to their communities. Gender sensitive participatory approaches were used in the selection of these committee members. Looking at the way women are down played in roles of community development, it was agreed that each JFFLS committee should have a minimum of 4 women.

The committee members, using the qualities of a good facilitator discussed, later identified the JFFLS facilitators. The facilitators were finally selected and approved in collaboration with the district and
area leaders. Each JFFLS selected 5 facilitators. Looking at the low number of women in 3 of the 4 main facilitator groups i.e. (1. agriculture extension worker, 2. teacher, 3. Child protection worker/PTA member, 4. Social animators/community members) it was agreed that each JFFLS should have at least 1 female community member and at least 1 female in the other 3 groups. At the end, a gender picture below was depicted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JFFLS site</th>
<th>Five facilitators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bwanje</td>
<td>Agriculture extensionist (m)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalande</td>
<td>Agriculture extensionist (m)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nankokota</td>
<td>Agriculture extensionist (m)</td>
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<td>Nthumbo</td>
<td>Agriculture extensionist (m)</td>
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<td>Ulande</td>
<td>Agriculture extensionist (m)</td>
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<td>Nakundu</td>
<td>Agriculture extensionist (m)</td>
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<td>Namazizi</td>
<td>Agriculture extensionist (f)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nkhudzi</td>
<td>Agriculture extensionist (m)</td>
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**Totals 25/ 15**

The facilitators were later met by some members from the JFFLS TWG and briefed on the JFFLS concept, its objectives, and what is expected of them. JFFLS discussions, questions and answers were tackled during the meeting. They were also at a glance assessed of their capabilities.

**Training JFFLS Facilitators**

The JFFLS facilitation team encompasses all literacy levels, from one who barely write his name to a qualified teacher and agriculture extension worker.

First things first, the agreed JFFLS language of communication was Chichewa (spoken by all) and no members from the same JFFLS should sit next to each other. The training set up was an informal one. The trainers integrated all views and suggestions from the facilitators on the contents of the training. Synergies were created between what the facilitators already knew and what was new during the training.

The training covered livelihood and life skills. Specifically, the training covered 4 main areas: Production; Processing and utilization; Preservation; and Life skills. Looking at the amount of materials to be discussed in these topics, two separate trainings were created to avoid overburdening the facilitators with too much to take home. The first training covered Life skills and production and the second training followed 3 months later with processing and utilization and some refreshers and additions on life skills and production. Each training set took 12 days. The first training was to lay the foundation and start up. The second was to proceed with what has started.

Life skills covered child protection issues, gender equity issues, HIV/AIDS issues and psycho-social support. Livelihood skills covered agriculture and nutrition issues. In the picture, a hands on training session on sack gardening in progress.
A multi experienced trainers’ team was developed that included master facilitators from Department of agriculture research, Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture, Eye of the Child, FAO and UNICEF.

**Amalgamating JFFLS into the communities**

JFFLS in Malawi are established at community primary schools. Communities have traditionally regarded schools with suspicion due to the schools’ top-down authoritarian approach. This suspicion further spilled over to the JFFLS during the initial 2 months of establishment. “It takes a village to educate a child and a child to lead a village when older” this was the approach JFFLS facilitators and committee members took to the communities. All members in the community regardless of their status in the village were offered the ‘freedom of the garden’. In the presence of facilitators, community members come to the JFFLS with ideas and innovations they feel to share with the children within the JFFLS concept. *(But this brought its own challenge—ownership, facilitators and committee felt no longer in control of the JFFLS!)*

Cultural activities high on the JFFLS agenda include Drama, songs, dances, and poetry. Open and field days have become a community oasis of not only knowledge but also fun, most of these activities have a message to pass on like HIV/AIDS, gender, and also the JFFLS itself. Interactive drama, the common drama at Nakundu JFFLS is as fun to the visitors as to the residents, “Interactive drama consent to information from within and without to come up with the best”. In the picture, an interactive drama in session. Various organizations in Malawi are fighting some risky cultural beliefs. Common are ‘kusasa fumbi’ ‘chokolo’ ‘fisi’ ‘kupimbira’. These are also present in the JFFLS districts. The JFFLS in Malawi are not a tool to fight these hazardous cultural beliefs. Sometimes, during JFFLS open days and visitors, messages against these beliefs have been depicted in songs and dances, this are presented as views which are inline and have been accepted by the greater part of the participating communities.

Cultural and social issues are also discussed during life skill sessions within a day’s programme. *(It has been noted that most JFFLS prefer to place life skills sessions in between livelihood sessions, as they regard as regard them as things to know unlike livelihood skills which are regarded as things to do)*

Girl participation which is usually low in most children groups, the situation in the JFFLS is different. Girl participation has always been good. Culturally most of the activities in the JFFLS are not taboo to both sexes. Of course some topics are tackled separately, as are gender sensitive.

**Curriculum development:**

A written JFFLS curriculum outlines all the activities to be undertaken at the JFFLS site. This helps the facilitators and all stakeholders in the planning and execution of the JFFLS activities. A discussion oriented 4 months curriculum was developed with reference to the ‘JFFLS how to manual’. This formed a basis for discussing the curriculum with the JFFLS facilitators and committee members. Later, each JFFLS came up with its draft curriculum.

Time was allocated during one of the facilitator monthly reports meeting for scrutinizing the draft curricula from the JFFLS. After exchange of ideas amongst individual JFFLS facilitators and consultation with FAO, district Ministry of education office and WFP JFFLS personnel present, a draft written curriculum was developed for each district. This was adopted by the facilitators. Each JFFLS later came up with

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1 A Non Governmental Organization dealing with Child issues in Malawi.
its written session time table or plan that balanced well the livelihood and life skill components. ‘JFFLS prefer to developed their session timetables or plans for a period ranging 2 to 4 months, in rare cases up to 6 months’. The JFFLS follow the district draft curriculum but differ in the contents of their session time table or plans of activities for a designated time. By the end of time, each JFFLS cover all the components of the curriculum. The learning cycle is one year following the processing and preservation sessions which are included in the curriculum.

**JFFLS session gatherings**

JFFLS meet twice a week, on specified days, for 2 to 3 hours. Each day missed from uncontrollable reasons is recovered with a spare day. Each day covers theory and practical sessions. It is common to see children visiting the junior farmer field daily to see how it is progressing, and weed or water where necessary. Open and field days are arranged on specific days more often than not Saturdays. In the picture, a Livelihood session in progress where a girl explains her observations in a cassava plot. The children love their garden and JFFLS very much. They do not complain to meet on none meeting days. This might be attributed to the point that the things are new and the JFFLS has just started in Malawi.

‘Currently checking the trends, 7 months of implementation/ piloting now!’

**Replication**

Almost all the children in the JFFLS boast of a backyard garden or a winter garden at their homes. They are trying to replicate what they are doing at the JFFLS at their homesteads. Fish, most of the times, is the only relish in a meal in Mangochi. The end of the tunnel is brighter for a vegetable inclusion in their diets when backyard gardens become a must for every home. ‘As we meet the new experiences, we just hold our fingers crossed as each day passes by” facilitator at Nthumbo JFFLS

Thank you for bringing JFFLS at Namazizi School. Tadziwa zamibiri and still discovering.