



Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools

What is it?

It is a simple methodology for teaching vulnerable children and young people about farming and how to take care of themselves. It uses a “living classroom” approach in which the students observe the crops throughout the growing season with the help of a facilitator. Agricultural topics are linked to life skills so that when children talk about how to protect their plants from diseases they also learn how to protect themselves from diseases and other adverse conditions. The school builds the students’ self-confidence and problem solving skills by having them decide for themselves what steps are required, for example, to cope with crop pests or diseases and then defend their decisions in front of their peers in open discussions.

FAO would like to acknowledge the contribution to its JFFLS programme made by the UN system-wide Work Programme on Scaling-up HIV/AIDS Services for Populations of Humanitarian Concern.

Giving vulnerable children a fighting chance



What the children and youth say

“My parents died when I was eight. I didn’t learn anything from my parents, although I remember mother used to go to the field to till the land.”

– Sara, 12

“I’d like to be a farmer some day but I don’t have any land.”

– Erick, 16

“I think I’ll be able to farm. My aunt is old but the land is there that I can use.”

– Aloo, 16

“You can study and still not find a job, but if you can farm, you can go and do something for yourself.”

– Francisco, 15

“AIDS is very, very serious because it can kill any person. To avoid it, you should not get involved in sexual intercourse, or if you do you should use a condom. I learned this in school as well as at the farmers’ school.”

– Paulo Filipe, 17

For more detailed information, visit:

http://www.fao.org/bestpractices/content/11/11_04_en.htm

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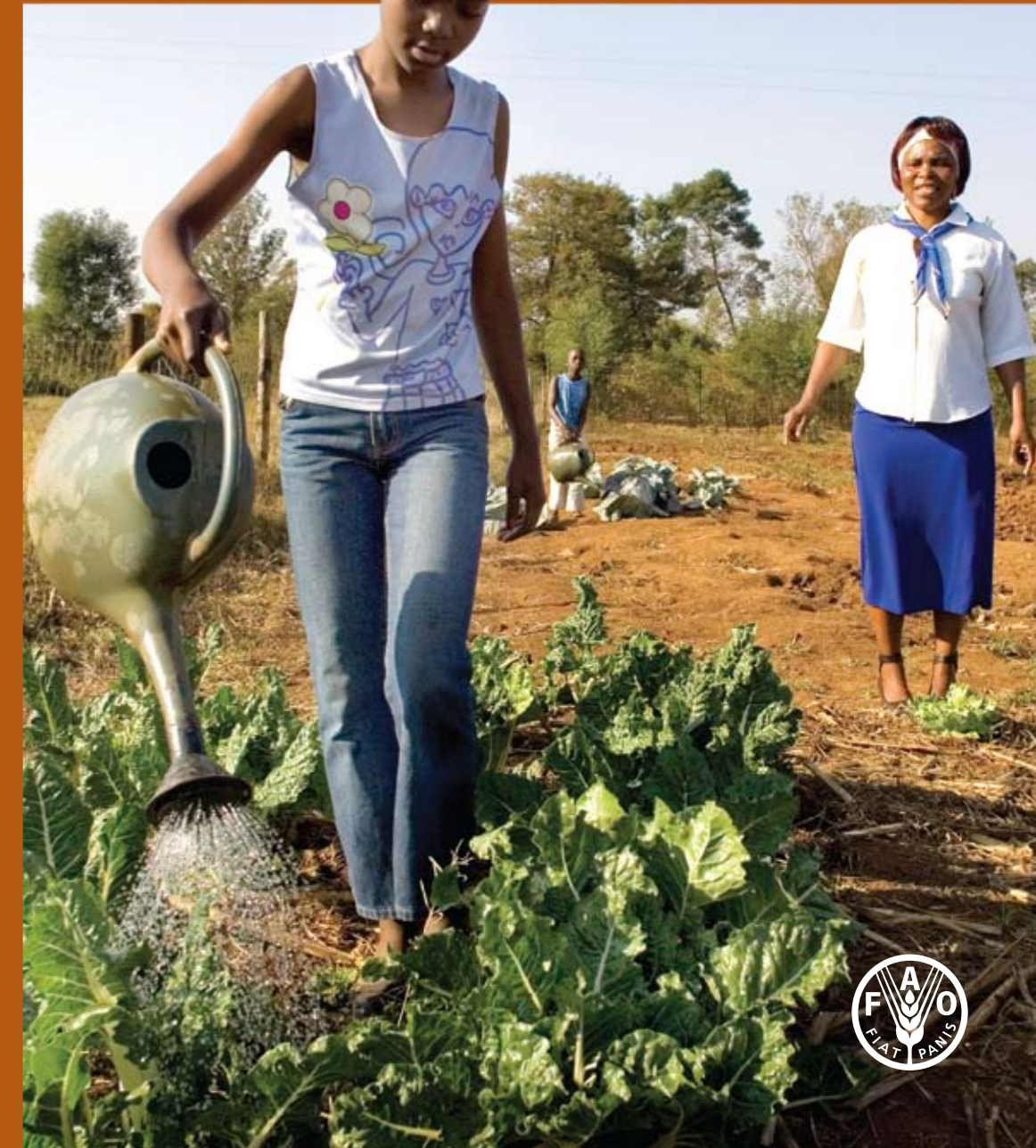


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Which vulnerable groups do the schools address?

The number of orphans worldwide associated with HIV and other causes is projected to exceed 25 million by 2010. But there are other vulnerable children and youth too: young refugees, demobilized child soldiers and children returning to their homes after conflict. They grow up without learning farming and other survival skills from their parents, skills that could enable them to earn a living or avoid risky behaviours that might increase their vulnerability and food insecurity. Social skills and progressive attitudes, including gender equality, are also taught at the schools.

How and where did it start?

The Junior Farmer Field and Life School methodology emerged from experiences gained in adult schools pioneered by FAO in the 1990s in Asia and also from an adult life school developed to tackle the rapid spread of HIV in Cambodia in the same decade. The junior version was field tested in Chimoio, Mozambique and in Bondo, Kenya in 2004.

Is it successful?

By the end of 2009, more than 20 000 children graduated from 545 Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools in 12 countries and territories, from Uganda to the Gaza Strip. More schools will soon open in other countries and the approach has been picked up and sustained by FAO partners in at least three other countries.

Does it address gender issues?

In both its curriculum and structure, the junior field schools teach boys and girls that they are equal. Male and female students learn field ecology and discuss how to respond to field problems together. Their access to resources like land, water and seeds, their farming roles and their responsibilities are all equal, a value that hopefully they will carry into adulthood. Through theatre, dance and role playing, the children enact scenarios in which men and women interact as equals. These productions are often shown to the community, a further influence on gender relations. Most of all through the schools girls gain self-esteem so they can stand up for themselves.

Is it adaptable to other situations?

The model has already been adapted to emergency situations. The model has also been adapted to address issues such as property rights, prevention of child labour in agriculture, youth employment and entrepreneurship within the training package.



Teachers explain why concept caught on

■ BONDO, Kenya

The junior farmer field and life school concept was introduced in four schools in the district in 2004. Then, as the fields prospered and participating students and facilitators became more confident, teachers and students from other schools were invited to visit the fields and learn about the method. As of late 2008, over 20 other schools had started their own programmes, without any help from outside agencies or even the school district.

“What I think really attracted the other schools was the fact that the guardians came on board to help the children,” says Anne Anam, a charismatic local teacher who pioneered the method at her school. Out of 669 students at Ms Anam’s school, 213 are orphans cared for by

guardians, usually elderly aunts or grandmothers.

It is these elderly women who break the hard African soil to prepare the gardens for planting, give vegetable seeds to the project from their own gardens and cook the school lunches. The field school concept combines the efforts of teachers, orphans and guardians. This teamwork is critical because guardians can assume the heavier chores which are not appropriate for children and for which teachers are often too busy.

“Normally, the children only eat one meal a day in the evening,” explains Ms Anam. “Now, they are fed lunch on the days they have the field school. I have noticed that the performance of the

children who were being fed improved, and there were quite a number of them who made it to high school.”

Walter Odera, a primary school principal in the district, explains why he brought the field school method to his school, in which about a third of students are orphans.

“We started this one because we wanted to get the knowledge how to plant local seeds, to plant the maize that the students would be able to use at home. This will assist them in future instead of begging,” he says.