



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

Junior farmer field  
and life schools in the



**CENTRAL AFRICAN  
REPUBLIC**

## Introduction and background



More than 70 percent of the population in the Central African Republic is under 35 years of age. Social and economic exclusion, compounded by a poverty rate of more than 60 percent, has hit the rural population hard, posing a challenge to the country's peace and stability. It is worth remembering that the Central African Republic has been experiencing prolonged instability for several decades. The country's agricultural sector has the potential to provide employment opportunities to young people and to sustainably enhance peacebuilding. However, there is still a limited number of agricultural and entrepreneurial training initiatives tailored to the needs of vulnerable young people.

To address this situation, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in partnership with government institutions, organized a **training session for facilitators in the Junior farmer field and life schools (JFFLS) approach**. This is the result of a collaboration between the FAO country office and the team on the Strategic Programme 3 *Reduce rural poverty* and the FAO Regional Office for Africa's regional initiative 3 *Building resilience in Africa's drylands*. The training complements other ongoing FAO initiatives to strengthen the resilience of livelihoods in vulnerable communities in the Central African Republic (see Box 1).

The training was held between 29 October and 21 November 2019 and used **participatory adult learning methods**. The main aim of the training was to identify and train different community stakeholders thus creating a spillover effect through a subsequent cascade of JFFLS trainings.

### BOX 1: THE MONT CARMEL PROJECT IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The [Mont Carmel](#) project being implemented by FAO aims to revive agricultural activities in order to strengthen resilience among those who have been affected by the crisis in the country. The project's main objective is to set up a pilot training centre for youth to build their technical agricultural capacities, and develop their organization into institutionalized groups and cooperatives to facilitate their labour market insertion. In addition, a number of awareness-raising activities at community-level aim at improving social cohesion and inter-community dialogue.

Donor: Government of Italy

Period: February 2017 – June 2020

Budget: USD 2 million

Beneficiaries: 1 500 young people





## Junior farmer field and life schools (JFFLS)

FAO piloted the first [Junior farmer field and life school](#) (JFFLS) in Mozambique in 2003–2004 in response to the rising number of orphans and vulnerable children affected by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) pandemic. Since 2003, approximately 35 000 young people in more than 20 countries have benefited from JFFLSs (FAO, 2017). This model is based on the FAO farmer field school (FFS) approach. The FFSs are a learning approach that teaches groups of farmers how to experiment and resolve problems independently (Dhamankar and Wongtschowski, 2014). It has been adapted to the specific needs of vulnerable young people in crisis contexts, such as young refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as post-conflict returnees.

In the context of protracted crises, the beneficiaries of the JFFLS programme are young people aged 12 to 24 years, or older. JFFLS provide vulnerable young people with practical and commercial farming skills while helping them become more resilient, productive and involved in their communities. The focus is on learning life skills, social skills, problem-solving and improving self-confidence through discussions, observation, role-playing and experimentation (FAO, 2017).

JFFLS programmes usually include two or three sessions per week in the classroom or in the field after normal school hours. Courses are held throughout the year and follow the crop cycle thus providing the students with both theoretical and practical knowledge (FAO, 2017).

# The training of facilitators in the Central African Republic

Prior to the start of the training, FAO organized a workshop for public and private institutional partners to share information and raise awareness on the approach. Under the technical and operational guidance of FAO, working through local partners, **twenty-five facilitators, including agriculture and livestock technicians from national partner institutions, NGOs and youth producer organizations, underwent training and certification** in the JFFLS approach in order to help set up JFFLSs in their communities and organizations. The training was held in Boali (located 95 km north-west of the capital city Bangui), where a farm was lent to the training to run practical exercises in vegetable production.

## THE PARTICIPANTS

### Government departments:

- Ministry of Youth and Sport;
- Minister of Primary, Secondary, Technical and Literacy Education;
- Central African Agency for Agricultural Development;
- High Commission for the National Young Pioneers;
- National Livestock Development Agency.



© FAO

### Non-governmental organizations:

- TABITHA;
- Technical Support Group for Development Initiatives (GATID);
- Association for Community Development (ADC);
- African Youth in Livestock, Fisheries and Aquaculture Incubators Network in Central African Republic (AYL-FAIN CAF).

### The private sector:

- THL-Consulting;
- Young private producers.

Young beneficiaries of the Mount Carmel project

## Immediate outcomes and impact

The facilitators gained skills to make their own observations in the field by using the “learning by doing” method, thus sharing their experiences with support from practitioners and technicians in partner institutions. This methodology enabled them to promote innovative solutions to the challenges they face in the agricultural sector at the local level. The following results are worth noting:

- **Action plans** were drawn up, each with a timetable of activities;
- **Individual teaching start-up kits** (seeds, watering cans, square shovels, tape measure, pickaxe, pair of boots, rake, hoe, sprayer) were distributed to all the participants at the end of the training;
- A **pilot JFFLS** was set up at the district primary school in Boali. The team being trained taught the children market gardening techniques. The schoolchildren were able to buy school supplies, thanks to income from the sales of vegetables from the school’s garden.



## Added value and prospects

The JFFLS approach was welcomed by the participants as providing an **important contribution to strengthening the capacity** of partner institutions and youth organizations; these include through developing and operating innovative agricultural and entrepreneurial development activities tailored to the specific needs of young people, including the youngest who are not directly targeted by FAO projects. In particular, the training brought to light the following lessons learned and prospects:

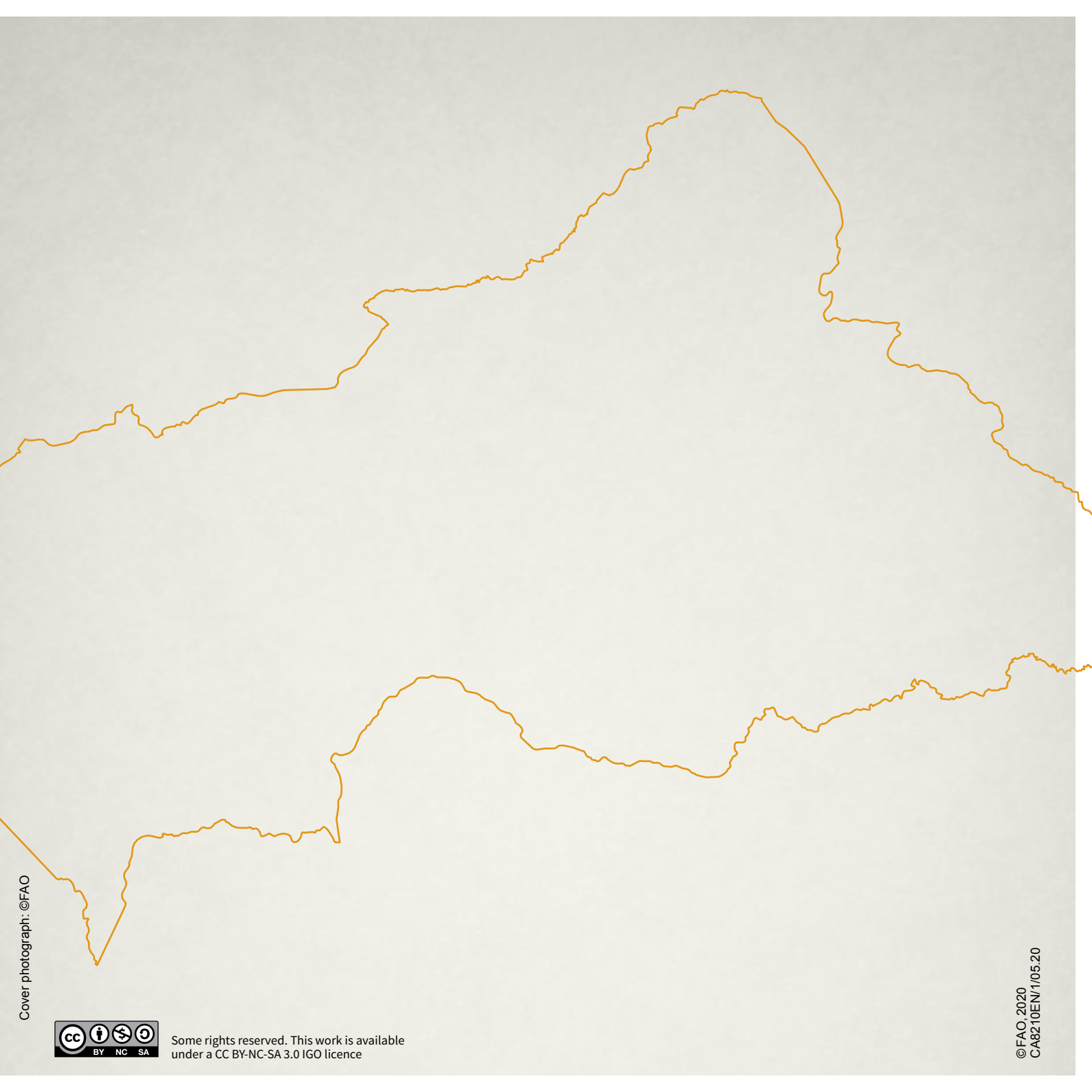
- The development partners and facilitators worked with the government to identify main opportunities that lie ahead, enabling gradual creation of a strong link between the JFFLS and “[Caisse de résilience](#)” (resilience fund) approaches, thereby providing opportunities for young people to become effective agents of community change.
- By involving primary school teachers in Bangui and Boali to become local facilitators, the project can help to convey and improve schoolchildren’s knowledge of agriculture, food security and nutrition from an early age.

- FAO support and close monitoring during the initial stage of the facilitators’ trainings of trainers are now **crucial factors in replicating this approach**. Moreover, a strong sense of ownership of the JFFLS by the young people themselves is another key aspect to the long-term success of this approach in the Central African Republic.

“FAO is undoubtedly making a valuable contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Central African Republic through this innovative approach of providing agricultural and social advisory support to young people,” says Léa Gisèle Malessobou of the National Young Pioneers (JPN) and representative of the facilitators. She explains that the main advantage of the JFFLS lies in its innovative approach to teach sustainable agricultural practices to young people.

## References

FAO. 2017. *Distress migration and youth in protracted crises: The Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools approach*. Rome. 32 pp. (Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6632e.pdf>)  
 Dhamankar, M. et. Wongtschowski. 2014. *Farmer Field Schools (FFS)*. Note 2. GFRAS Good Practice Notes for Extension and Advisory Services. GFRAS: Lindau, Switzerland.



Cover photograph: ©FAO



Some rights reserved. This work is available under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence

©FAO, 2020  
CA8210EN/1/05.20