



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

FAO's Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools give children a voice

Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) are a simple methodology for teaching vulnerable children and young people about farming, entrepreneurial skills and how to take care of themselves. These schools follow a "living classroom" approach in which the students or children out of school observe the crops throughout the growing season.

Objective of JFFLS

To empower vulnerable children to have a better future and improve their livelihoods and long-term food security.

They attend one to two sessions per week in the field and are encouraged to embrace what they learn during class and apply to their own crops. Agricultural topics are complemented by life skills that teach children not only how to protect their plants but also themselves from diseases and other adverse conditions.

Participatory field activity includes crop selection and cultivation, land preparation, pest management, cultivation of medicinal plants and income generation; local theatre, art, dance and music are also integral aspects of each JFFLS day.

The JFFLS also address issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender, child protection, nutrition and business and have a set of guiding principles that draw heavily from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They contribute to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of combating HIV/AIDS and improving the lives of the children, particularly in rural areas. Indirectly, the programme contributes to MDG 4 and 2 (reducing child mortality and achieving universal education).

The Junior Schools are run by a set of facilitators with a combination of agriculture and social skills to oversee the implementation process. They play a central role in the day-to-day running of the school and facilitate learning, by encouraging participation and trust. The facilitators

fall into three categories: teachers, who are in charge of the JFFLS in the formal schools and whose work complements that of the community animators; the agriculturalists, who also play a supervisory role and bring in the technical aspects in agronomy; and the social animators (some of whom are retired teachers or social workers), in charge of the community JFFLS, to ensure that the children within the communities have someone from their own community to provide the requisite support.

To date, 109 JFFLS have been established by FAO in the districts of Kaabong, Kotido, Kaberamaido, Adjumani and Kitgum with about 3,270 young people attending.

They are vulnerable children who have been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS or other chronic diseases, conflict or gender based violence. Others come from households that are headed by severely disabled parents. The majority of these children live with elderly grandparents or guardians.

Such children are growing up without learning farming and other survival skills from their parents; skills that could help them earn a living or avoid risky behaviors that might increase their vulnerability and food insecurity. In addition to experiencing trauma, vulnerable children are more likely to be at risk of malnutrition, disease, abuse, stigmatization, and sexual exploitation.

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Impact

The JFFLS increased enrollment, performance and attendance in primary schools that benefit from the programme. In Panyangara Primary School in Kotido district, 40 pupils returned to school between 2012 and 2013, thanks to the JFFLS. In Kaberamaido district, 64 children who belonged to community JFFLS were also attracted back to school in 2008. Improved attendance has also resulted in better performance by vulnerable children. In 2012 some of the topics covered in the JFFLS curriculum appeared in the Primary Leaving Examinations.

The production of vegetables and other crops in the JFFLS learning fields also improved the food diet of the children who usually cannot grow or buy such vegetables. For example, Lopuyo Primary School JFFLS in Kotido district uses a simple irrigation system to grow a variety of vegetables throughout the year. The vegetables are consumed by children and the surplus is shared with their families.

The training has created a positive flow-on effect. Children who are trained in the JFFLS became role models and are in turn sharing the knowledge and skills acquired with other family members and the wider community.

Empowerment outcomes reported from JFFLS include changes in perspectives with boosted self-confidence as well social change. Vulnerable children learnt how to take a greater control over their lives.

The JFFLS provides a voice for vulnerable children, opportunities and ability to voice their concerns and participate in informal decision making and governance processes locally and nationally.

The knowledge and skills acquired by the young girls and boys also help them develop positive values regarding gender equality, human rights and interacting with the opposite sex.

The JFFLS opens up a channel for children to report or talk about problems such as sexual harassment and defilement. They report cases to teachers or local leaders. This has contributed to reduction in cases of sexual harassment and defilement in the respective communities.



"I help my mother on the farm",

Ariko Bernard

"With the farming skills that I have acquired, I now help my mother on the farm. I like preparing the seed bed and watering the crops".

"I have learnt the dangers of gender-based violence",

Nagera Sylvia

"I have learnt that we have to discourage gender-based violence because it can lead to separation and divorce, which would expose the partners to HIV and AIDS. Children suffer when parents divorce and can drop out of school".



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