



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Farmer Field Schools engage women and men in gender-based violence prevention

FAO's Junior and adult Farmer Field and Life Schools (J/FFLS) are addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and helping to prevent and mitigate the effects of HIV in northern Uganda through the provision of key life skills and knowledge in agricultural production and nutrition.

Problem being addressed

At the centre of a devastating civil conflict from 1986 to 2006, northern Uganda remains one of the poorest regions in the country, with 64 percent of its population unable to meet basic needs - twice as high as the national average.

An estimated 1.8 million people suffered displacement as a result of war, pushing men, women, boys and girls to the edge of chronic food insecurity, poverty and making them vulnerable to HIV and social injustices such as gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence and HIV

Gender-based violence, by mostly affecting the productive population groups (age 15 to 45), has a devastating impact on the agriculture sector and security: illness (including HIV) or injuries as a result of violence reduce work capacity, productivity and livelihood assets. Many victims and survivors of gender-based violence are stigmatized and excluded from community and social activities, and deprived of support. Risky coping strategies, such as commercial sex, employed by those facing food and livelihood insecurity and humanitarian crises, often lead to further erosion of the livelihood asset base, and

further vulnerability to gender-based violence and HIV transmission.

What FAO is doing

Through training, using the Junior/Farmer Field and Life Schools (J/FFLS) methodology, FAO is implementing an integrated intervention that increases awareness on gender issues, reduces stigma of HIV and improves the levels of nutrition and food security of men, women, boys and girls in the most vulnerable communities.

The J/FFLS are known as "schools without walls", where groups of male and female farmers learn through observation and experimentation in their own context. Beneficiaries of the field schools also receive agricultural inputs to assist them diversify and increase productivity of their farms.

Children/youth who belong to the junior schools also learn about staying healthy and protecting themselves from HIV through classroom-based discussions. For example, children learn how to protect crops from pests or treat diseased crops and draw parallels with how they can take care of their bodies and prevent themselves from becoming infected with HIV.

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Impact

Livelihoods of men, women, boys and girls affected by HIV, gender inequality and food insecurity improved through the J/FFLS training and subsequently through the adoption of better agricultural techniques and nutrition practices. The majority of female beneficiaries adopted backyard gardens to reduce expenditure on vegetables, and both men and women are encouraged to invest in alternative income-generating activities to increase self-reliance and food security. This in turn has led to enhanced nutritional status, greater quantity and diversity of food produced and increased incomes through the sale of surplus produce.

The grouping effect of the J/FFLS approach helped reduce stigma, strengthen social re-integration, and empower individuals affected by HIV and/or GBV and their

families. It also proved to be a powerful tool for peace building, reconciliation and reconstruction of social cohesion between different ethnic groups, as well as among returnees.

Results from the projects have also shown that capacity training, combined with the popularity of the J/FFLS approach among local populations, have created a positive flow-on effect. The observed impact extends far beyond the boundaries of the project sites: the people trained in the schools became role models and are in turn promoting and starting new field schools in response to increased demand from neighbouring communities. These extended field schools also integrate HIV and gender training and promote discussions among members of the community.



Ange Mary was a victim of gender based violence caused by a struggle over a few resources that the family had after displacement. "My husband preferred selling food and using the income for alcohol rather than buying essential commodities and paying school fees for children", she says.

When she joined the Aswa Ribe Ber FFLS in Amuru district, she underwent season long training in agriculture and advocacy, gender concepts and joint planning. She invited her husband,

Lupokomoi to attend some sessions and soon, he appreciated the gender gaps in their family and gradually transformed. "That training is the best thing that has happened to our family", he says.

The couple now work together, right from field selection and preparation to harvest and using proceeds from the sale of surplus food. As a result of this intervention, they are now able to consolidate their resources to make tangible investments. Before the project intervention, this was a remote idea.

Acen Helen, an FFLS member living in the district of Katakwi, experienced firsthand the advantages of gender-based violence prevention activities: "My husband had accumulated debts in the village and was in the habit of selling off items in the house, including food," she says. "Whenever I asked, he would become violent and threaten to send me back to my parents, since I came without any property." "Last year I borrowed money to pay off his debts and purchased a pig, which recently littered 9 piglets. I could not imagine how this transformed the home – to see my husband willing to help take care of the pigs."

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