

## Farmer field schools, an evolving methodology

The farmer field school (FFS) is a group learning process whereby women and men farmers take part in activities where they learn by experience. This helps them to understand the ecology of their fields and improve their farming practices. The approach was developed in the late 1980s in Asia and has been a major success due to its participatory dimension which can incorporate different ecological realities and work within existing farm management methods. The article “West Africa – IPPM, a producer training programme based on the Farmer Field School method” provides an example of this methodology.

The JFFLS (Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools) are a further development of this methodology. The approach was first developed by both FAO and WFP (World Food Programme) in Mozambique in 2003 to cope with the high number of orphans left by the civil war and the ravages of HIV / AIDS.

In Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools, orphans and vulnerable children from 12-18 years of age are trained by inter-disciplinary teams of extension workers, school teachers and social workers, on traditional and modern agriculture as well as in life skills following the agricultural cycle. Children work in groups and learn through experimentation, drama, singing and dancing, or other participatory cultural methodologies. The main objective of the JFFLS is to empower vulnerable children to improve their livelihoods and long-term food security and to be in command of their own future. The article “Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools: continued expansion and new modules” presents this approach and its application in Africa.

Finally, given the pertinence of working on ‘life skills’ with young people, FAO has recently established the FFLS (Farmer Field and Life School) for adults in high health-risk or emergency situations. The article “Tackling food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and gender based violence in East Africa with Farmer Field and Life Schools” deals with this new perspective.

### West Africa – IPPM, a producer training programme based on the Farmer Field School method

Developed through cooperation between Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal and the Netherlands, the Integrated Production and Pest Management (IPPM) programme is a capacity-building programme for small producers, aimed at reducing dependence on pesticides and improving the management of cropping systems. It was launched in 2001. Since then, FAO has been providing technical support to the programme and using a participatory methodology to train producers.

The aim of IPPM is to help combat food insecurity and poverty in rural areas. This is a widespread problem in West Africa, caused primarily through a significant degradation of natural resources due to poor climatic conditions, which have weakened natural ecosystems, as well as to the irrational use of agrochemicals, production systems that are unsuited to farming conditions and realities and, above all, a lack of training and information among farmers. IPPM uses a participatory training methodology based on the Farmer Field Schools (FFS), first introduced to West Africa in 1995.

#### Field School principles

The Farmer Field School is an adult learning framework that facilitates the transfer of innovation in agriculture and many other areas. The name ‘Field School’ was chosen to reflect the educational character of the training, the fact that it takes place in the fields and that conditions in the fields determine the bulk of

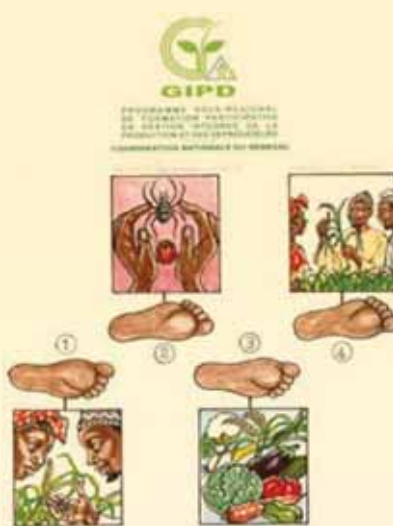
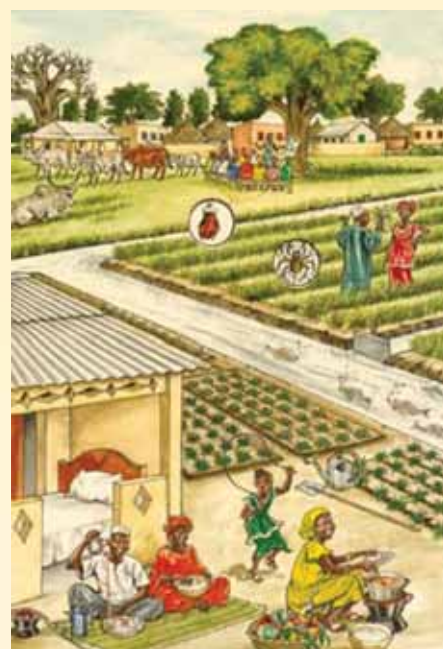


# Application of IPPM principles for healthy and sustainable agriculture

## BEFORE IPPM



## AFTER IPPM



## IPPM PRINCIPLES

Rural populations usually lack the education needed to use agrochemicals correctly. Consequently, they often apply the wrong doses, do not use personal protective equipment and fail to comply with the associated regulations. Empty packaging is reused or rinsed out at water supply points. All of these practices heighten

the health risks to humans and animals, pollute the environment with a resultant loss of biodiversity and create major disruption in households. The Field School scheme and IPPM use participatory principles as a basis for addressing this key issue in agricultural areas. The training process enables farmers to

increase their income, protect the environment and learn about crop management. Communication and exchanges of experience between local people have improved considerably.

the study programme. Actual problems encountered in the fields are observed and analysed, from planting through to harvesting of the crop. Farmer Field Schools operate on the following principles:

- **Grow a healthy crop:** use the right varieties of seeds and appropriate cropping practices to produce healthier plants.
- **Observe crops regularly:** ensure informed decision-making for appropriate interventions on problems relating to water, soil, fertilisation, pests and weeds.
- **Conserve natural enemies:** protecting their habitats is an active method of conserving natural enemies.
- **Make farmers experts in their own fields** so that they can manage their fields with the necessary knowledge and expertise. Expertise implies a basic understanding of the agro-ecological system and decision-making processes.

The teaching objectives of the FFS are to facilitate sound understanding by targeted farmers through exchanges with technicians. The group (farmers and technician) manages the crop, carries out observations and analyses

all of the results. Through these exchanges, the producer comes to understand the physiological behaviour of the plants, the life cycle of insects as well as their respective status and roles in a crop plantation. This participatory method encourages initiative on the part of the farmer, consolidates agro-ecological knowledge and allows the farmer to become less dependent on agrochemicals and thereby to help conserve the environment.

### Women's involvement

This participatory approach mainstreams gender by involving women in the training of facilitators and producers. Women are particularly heavily involved with market-garden crops, making up 58% of the producers trained over a three-year period. However, they are less well represented in rice and cotton crop training. FFS help to empower women by giving them an opportunity to interact with the producers' group and to capitalise on their experiences with crop management throughout the crop cycle. Upon completion of the training, some women go on to help train other producers. Interaction in mixed groups is facilitated by group dynamic exer-

cises, which help bring the participants closer together and improve their communication skills. The head of a women's group that received the training said: "The programme has created a healthy dynamic in the village. For almost a decade, all our attempts to work in a group proved unsuccessful. Since we started working in the FFS, there has been a widespread sense of motivation and all the group's members have enjoyed working together. As head of the group, I appreciate the way that IPPM has made it easier for us to work together collectively and improved our internal dynamic." Women's role in agricultural development is now widely acknowledged, but the Field School training also helps to ensure that women's voices are heard during discussions on questions and issues raised.

### \* For more information, please contact:

**Mohamed Hama Garba**  
IPPM Regional Coordinator  
mohamed.hamagarba@fao.org  
**Makhfousse Sarr**  
IPPM/Sénégal Coordinator  
makhfousse.sarr@fao.org

# The Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools: continued expansion and new modules

Since 2003, growing numbers of Junior Farmer Field Schools (JFFLS) are operating in seventeen, mainly African, countries. The goal of the JFFLS is to empower vulnerable youth, giving them livelihood options and long term food security while minimizing their vulnerability to risky coping strategies.

In a JFFLS, around 30 rural boys and girls meet a few times a week to acquire agricultural and life skills. They work together on a piece of land to learn about and experiment with new and traditional agricultural techniques and discuss issues that are crucial in their daily lives, such as prevention of diseases, decision making and the importance of working together. The sessions are organized and facilitated by adults from the community, often teachers and agricultural experts, who have been trained on the JFFLS approach. The selection of the participants as well as the design of the curriculum are done in consultation with the community. The participants attend the JFFLS for one agricultural cycle.

The JFFLS approach was initially developed by FAO and WFP as a response to the HIV orphan crisis and first started in Mozambique. It has been adapted to address emergency situations, rural youth employment and child labour prevention. FAO, as well as various governments, NGOs, and UN joint Programmes have since then integrated the approach into various programmes.

## Implementation and the role of FAO

FAO frequently sets up pilots with partners to introduce and adapt the approach to an

area and specific target groups. FAO provides support to the running and monitoring of most JFFLSs, through organizing training of facilitators and developing training and monitoring materials and promoting exchange of knowledge through publications and workshops. A toolkit for the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of the JFFLS programme was developed in 2009, which provides a summary of M&E principles relevant to JFFLS and describes a minimum set of core tools for on-going monitoring and programme evaluation. A considerable part of the toolkit is dedicated to the evaluation of outcomes and impact of JFFLS programmes, which is important for tracking the progress as well as for advocacy.

Modalities for implementation, monitoring and funding vary. In Mozambique for example, the government has assigned some of their officers to coordinate the JFFLSs, which number more than 58. In Western Kenya, the Farmer Field School (FFS) network, coordinated from the Ministry of Agriculture, is overseeing the different JFFLS projects with the assistance of a JFFLS officer based at FAO. In Ghana, a group of NGOs, in collaboration with FAO, has decided to use the approach in their 'family strengthening programme', while at the

same time promoting youth employment and organic farming skills.

In some cases, communities are running the JFFLS without core funding. Western Kenya provides an interesting example in this respect, since the JFFLSs have been linked to a larger plot of land where caretakers farm and learn. Yields are used to provide for the lunches for the children and to cover the costs of the JFFLS learning sessions. In Mozambique, JFFLS graduates are now actively involved in running JFFLSs for their younger peers.

In Mozambique, eight young farmers' cooperatives have been formed by JFFLS graduates, who have been provided with follow-up entrepreneurship training, within the context of the One UN Youth Employment programme.

## The JFFLS learning process

In the JFFLS learning process, which is adapted by the facilitators according to the climatic and socio-cultural circumstances, focus is on learning by doing. A constant link is made between the agricultural cycle and the life cycle. The JFFLS approach is based on an experiential learning process that encourages the group to observe, draw conclusions, and make informed decisions consistent with good agricultural and life practices. In the field, this means that participants study crop-related issues within the framework of their analysis of the problems they face in their own lives. In JFFLS, participants analyze livelihood and social problems and discuss the results with their peers, through drama, play and other methods. In situations where children have very limited access to information and facilities, helping children to play, think, discuss, and to capitalize on local resources to solve their problems is a suitable strategy for enhancing their empowerment and self-esteem.



Junior Farmers Field and Life Schools, Hebron, West Bank.

### Gender Sensitivity

It has been observed that girls are more likely to drop out from JFFLS than boys, mainly because of their workload at home, therefore a gender focus is essential to reach the goal of empowerment for boys and girls. One of the main objectives of JFFLS is to promote the creation of gender-equal attitudes, by enabling the youth to exercise the same roles and responsibilities and to stimulate them to think critically about the gender relationships in their society.

### Three new JFFLS training modules

JFFLS has proven to be a good way to discuss complex issues with vulnerable youth. Recently FAO has incorporated three new topics in the curriculum:

### Preventing child labour in agriculture

The new module on child labour in agriculture, which will help to address the topic in JFFLS explicitly, has been developed by FAO in collaboration with ILO (International Labour Organization), facilitators and partner organizations in Mozambique, Kenya and Ghana.

### Land and property rights

Access to and control and management of natural resources, especially land, is a key determinant of income, power, status and rural livelihoods. FAO took the initiative to develop a JFFLS training module with information and practical exercises including role plays to help children and their caretakers understand the basic concepts of land and property rights and the impacts that gender inequality in land and property rights can have on people's livelihoods and food security.

### Entrepreneurship and business skills

Given the often limited opportunities for gainful employment in rural areas, JFFLS graduates are likely to sell surplus or set up their own agribusiness later on. The new module includes simple exercises and games to make children think strategically about how they can improve their future livelihoods in agriculture.

For more informatio, contact:  
JFFLS@fao.org

## JFFLS – Investing in the future of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in Northern Uganda

Various stakeholders in the Adjumani district were consulted on the participatory preparation of the project work plan and during the joint identification of the sub-counties to target. All facilitators received two weeks training organized by FAO.

MR. GEORGE OLIMA, DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL (DRC)

JFFLS steering committees were set up with the children's guardians, the schools' headmasters, members of the schools' management committees, etc. This management structure ensured the appropriation of the project by the schools and local authorities, therefore guaranteeing local capacity-building and the sustainability of the approach.

Approximately 600 school children from among OVC aged 12 to 18 years were identified jointly by local stakeholders (JFFLS steering committees, local authorities, Danish Refugee Council). Orphans and traumatized children, as well as children coming from extremely poor or difficult households were selected, using school registers and community perception and knowledge.

Thanks to this initiative:

- Children built a sense of team and established solidarity ties.
- Children are very active in peer-teaching thus increasing the impact of the knowledge transfer outside the JFFLS groups.
- Peer-teaching, associated with distribution of vegetable seeds, allowed families to develop household vegetable gardens.

This consequently improved their dietary diversity and provided income generating possibilities through the resale of surplus production.

- Child nutrition has improved.

- Orphans are better integrated in their host families.
- School attendance rates have improved.
- The approach also prepared the ground for interventions on other local issues requiring urgent attention and action.



# Tackling food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and Gender Based Violence in Eastern Africa with the FFLS

Rejected by her husband and community because she had been raped by a group of soldiers, Florence<sup>1</sup> was forced to live in the forest in South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for 4 years. The Farmer Field and Life School (FFLS) operated by a new project in the region targeting food insecure people affected by HIV/AIDS and Gender Based Violence (GBV) gave her the chance to re-integrate in the community. The fact that she was an active member of the FFLS group and that she owns a goat received from the project, made her status rise so that she was again accepted in the community.

Florence is one of the 75 000 targeted beneficiaries of the FAO Regional project “Eastern Africa regional response to food insecurity, HIV and GBV” supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). This project has been running for one and a half years and targets rural men, women, boys and girls in five countries: rural communities in eastern DRC; peri-urban areas and peace villages in Burundi, returnees from Tanzania in Rwanda, people affected by post-election violence in Kenya and resettled populations in Northern Uganda.

According to the Farmer Field School Foundation<sup>2</sup> the project has provided an innovative and ground breaking step towards a more participatory and beneficiary-driven support system that addresses the specific needs of vulnerable populations affected by HIV and GBV.

Setting up FFLS targeting adults is an innovative aspect of the project<sup>3</sup>. FAO considers the J/FFLS (Junior/ Farmer Field and Life School) as an approach which provides an excellent entry point and platform for improved self confidence and dignity among vulnerable people.

Due to lack of experience and capacity in this new approach in the three French-speaking countries (DRC, Burundi and Rwanda) the implementation was challenging. However, across the participating countries the project has proven to be a success, rewarded by the important impact observed at the beneficiary, household and community levels.

The project has promoted experience-sharing between countries through capacity exchange. For instance, Kenyan FFLS experts trained and backstopped some of the other countries. Also, lessons learnt were exchanged in regional forums, such as regional inception and stocktaking workshops. Finally, as a result of advocacy for a response in terms of food security to HIV and GBV undertaken at regional level and supported at county level, national projects have been developed.

The impact assessment of the project will be undertaken in the next two months but elements of impact that have already been observed and can be shared include:

- The horticulture and small livestock activities that are carried out in the JFFLS and replicated at home have **improved the dietary diversity** of HIV and GBV affected beneficiaries as well as their incomes, through resale of surplus production. As a result, a reduction of malnutrition has been observed.
- Beneficiaries of HIV sensitization are **increasingly recurring to voluntary testing** and those found positive are assisted with counselling and antiretroviral treatment.
- **By generating the youth’s (and specifically girls) interest and by providing them with a source of income, the JFFLS have allowed dropouts to go back to school and are helping those previously at risk of dropping out to stay in school.**

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- Not only has the group cohesion effect of the JFFLS approach allowed **stigma reduction, social re-integration and empowerment of individuals** affected by HIV and/or GBV and their families; but it has also proved to be a powerful tool for **peace-building, reconciliation and reconstruction of social cohesion** between different ethnic groups as well as between returnees, refugees and host communities. The most vulnerable have **rebuilt their livelihoods** and regained a certain degree of autonomy.
- Capacity-building and promotion of peer training and assistance, combined with the great interest raised by the JFFLS activities among local populations, have created a spill-over effect: the impact observed stretches far outside the boundaries of the project sites, as beneficiaries trained within the JFFLS become trainers themselves. In that way, thanks to JFFLS, participants have become role models for other members of the community.
- Finally, local authorities, NGOs and associations have greatly benefited from technical capacity building to jointly address issues of food insecurity, malnutrition, gender inequities and violence and can guarantee the sustainability of the project activities.



Kitchen garden in Rwanda.

#### ✿ For more information, please contact:

Karine Garnier  
Regional Emergency Officer  
FAO - Sub-Regional Emergency Office for East and Central Africa (REOA)  
Nairobi - Kenya  
[karine.garnier@fao.org](mailto:karine.garnier@fao.org)

1 Not her real name.

2 The FFS Foundation based in the Netherlands provides some technical backstopping on the FFS methodology to FAO.

3 For more information, refer to the introduction: “FFS, JFFLS, FFLS, an evolving methodology”.