



Taking our future in our hands...

*Facilitated, edited and compiled by
Mette Vaarst, Thaddeo Tibasiima, Aage Dissing and Inge Lis Dissing*



Storytelling from Uganda to inspire action

The work behind this report was conducted 2008-2019. All projects were funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Civil Society Fund, which is managed by 'Civil Society in Development', CISU. The majority of data behind the current book was collected in the Rwenzori region, where the team members behind this book were involved in the following three projects:

- SATNET 1 Development of a Farmer Field School concept for family food security in West Uganda. (Journal No: 09-629-MP-jan),
- SATNET 2 Building of capacity, social and human capital and advocacy through self-sustaining Farmer Field Schools for local food security and improved market access. (Journal no:10-897.SP-dec),
- SATNET 3 Sustainable Marketing Associations (MAs) for organic agribusiness development on basis of FFLGs in the Rwenzori Region, including advocating for an enabling environment for their activities. (Journal no. 14.1476-SP-apr).

In addition, we also were involved in the project 'Empower civil society and strengthen food security for farmer families', (ECOSAF, Journal no. 13-1286-SP-apr), and kept learning from colleagues in the organisations involved in the FFLG-projects around ECOSAF.

ISBN: 978-87-92841-77-3

Printed at 'Fjerritslev Tryk', 9690 Fjerritslev, Denmark, 2019.



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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All the stories have been compiled by the editing team: Mette Vaarst, Thaddeo Tibasiima, Aage Dissing, and Inge Lis Dissing, and this booklet is based on multiple experience and a lot of work done by tremendously many people, far too many to mention you all whom we gratefully acknowledge! Thank you so much to all the valuable, great discussions, talks, testimonies and reflections, and thank you so much to everybody for sharing knowledge, insight, hopes and visions with us, and who welcomed us to your homes, farms, gardens, FFLGs, MAs and organisations. It has been a journey and a continuous learning process during 10 years in different parts of Uganda, and with different organisations, in particular with SATNET and all its member organisations.

We gratefully thank Jane Nalunga, NOGAMU, who participated and co-developed the concept of FFLG throughout all the years, and with whom we spent uncountable many good hours during the many courses, workshops, fieldwork and farm visits. Your knowledge and experience on organic farming was a constant source of inspiration for everybody in the project. One major source of inspiration when initiating the FFLG project was Prof. John C. Munene's work on social capital: thank you so much for sharing your insight and vivid energy with us. We are particularly indebted to Longino Masareka – who was involved from the very start of the FFLG projects and contributed much to the case descriptions. Dinah Kizzah, Michael Kitooke, Samuel Mugisha and other colleagues in SATNET: thank you so much for all your sharing and good discussions over time. We gratefully thank Apollo Baguma from URDT, Godfrey Bogere from Sulma Foods Ltd., James Mutebi and Harriet Nakasi from Caritas Kampala, and Yusuf Wesonga from A2N, for sharing your experience from the ECOSAF FFLG-projects with us. Thank you so much to Gidi Smolders for your efforts to keep an overview over the data and reports collected along the way, and your valuable inputs to the processes. You have all helped us to select and analyse some of the case stories, which we tell in this book. Warm thank you - we enjoyed all our talks, sharing and working together.

This book is dedicated to everybody who believes that each living individual should have the possibility to take the future in his and her hands, and that we all must contribute to help making this possible for everybody.

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THE FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUP STORY DEVELOPED

This book aims at telling about our common learning in projects in different parts of Uganda, where farmer families and local communities have worked since 2009 to improve their livelihoods and environments based on common learning about organic and agroecological farming, joint efforts for better livelihoods and community development, using the approach of ‘Farmer Family Learning Groups’ (FFLG). This way of working together takes the ‘family approach’: our starting point is whole households working together on each their individual farm. As opposed to the methods where farmer groups work on demonstration farms or demonstration plots, this project is based on groups, which work at each other's individual farms, not focusing on one enterprise, but on building up their entire farming systems. The groups never followed the curricula of any manual directing ‘the one and only right approach’ – they learned together, set their own goals, and worked together in ways which were appropriate in the given geographical, climatic and social context.

In October 2008, the first process started as a collaboration between SATNET (Sustainable Agricultural Trainers’ network; www.satnet.org.ug), NOGAMU (National Organic Agriculture Movement of Uganda; <http://nogamu.org.ug/>) and OD (Organic Denmark; <http://organicdenmark.com/>) by carrying out an appraisal. These organisations conducted the first facilitator course in May-June 2009, leading to the formation of about 25 Farmer Family Learning Groups in the Rwenzori region in Western Uganda, and more came in the following two-year period, where the concept of FFLGs was shaped. Later, in 2011, the second project involved many more organisations, all non-governmental or civil society organisations, which were member organisations of SATNET. Other organisations, such as the Belgian organisation Broederlijk Delen also took interest in the approach and entered into partnership with SATNET and other organisations, to use it in some of their projects. Parallel to this, during 2011 and 2012, NOGAMU, Organic Denmark and four organisations: Caritas Kampala (<https://caritaskampala.org/>), Ugandan Rural Development & Training Programme (URDT; <http://urdt.net/>), Africa 2000 Network (<http://africa2000network.org/>, the Uganda group), and Sulma Foods Ltd (<https://www.food-companies.com/en/company/21353-SULMA-FOODS-LTD>), initiated a process to start forming Farmer Family Learning Groups in a new project, where the experiences gained in the projects in Rwenzori could inspire the work in these four organisations.

With this book, we wish to pass on some of the learnings from the project, mostly as stories and narratives, based on experience and stories from many of the groups, which we use as case studies to explore and illustrate the different forms and situations, where the FFLG approach was used. The overall conclusions from all the FFLG projects were that trustful inter-relations between people, and within and between the households in local communities were strong building blocks for any change. We observed many general improvements regarding food security, agronomic practices, education of children, hygiene, and many other areas. The active participation and involvement of everyone, the constant learning, setting new goals and working towards them, seemed to give the FFLGs a continuous life, and they went through phases of evolution and became mature groups, which constantly developed by taking up new activities based on the wishes and ambitions of the group members.

We tell some of the stories, which we heard with great thankfulness to all the people who shared with us. They showed us how FFLGs can be approached in various ways and give meaning in many different contexts. We sincerely hope that this can inspire and encourage others to ‘re-invent’ and build on it within many different contexts.

Everybody’s ownership, trust, respect, openness, equality, commitment, empathy and common learning can carry it forward.

*‘The beauty of the approach – like many other empowering group approaches – is its strong and clear foundation on values like respect, trust, equality, common learning, building up human and social capital and knowledge which is relevant and meaningful to each participant and learner, as well as probably the most important value: ownership’
(Quoted from ‘The Rwenzori Experience’, 2012).*

We have seen it work, and remain still amazed by what we saw that it did, and does. Not because anybody came to tell anybody else what to do, but because people took it into their own lives and took hand of their own situations, and the futures for themselves and the coming generations. We consider ourselves facilitators to sharing this knowledge and insight in a wider context.

Mette Vaarst, Thaddeo Tibasiima, Aage Dissing and Inge Lis Dissing



1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUPS

Working together as a household, and as a family, is a core to success. It is emphasized in the name, and a wealth of stories tells it. Joining efforts between many households and families in a local community, where families are working together in each other's' farms, setting goals together, and genuinely supporting each other to reach them, makes everybody benefit. It is simply that. Sharing knowledge, experiences, goals, labor and responsibilities is not the same as sharing a bucket of water, where the amount of people sharing it decides how much each person can have. When sharing knowledge, goals, labor and responsibilities, every participant gets more, the more they share.

What is typical for Farmer Family Learning Groups (FFLGs)?

THE ENTIRE FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD IS INVOLVED: The Farmer Family Learning Group (FFLG) approach is based on the commitment from whole families, or rather households.



This makes it different from for example womens' self-help groups and Farmer Field Schools, which do not have an explicit idea of who from the household participates. The FFLG approach is based on the recognition

of a household viewed as a unit, where everybody has an important role to play: work and responsibilities on a farm are distributed between family members. They do not have the same roles or types of work, but they develop mutual understanding and respect in a new way.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND TRUST IS BUILT BETWEEN FAMILY MEMBERS, AND BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE FFLGs:

Social capital is a main focus. It does not come by itself, it must be addressed and worked actively on by the facilitator(s), e.g. to avoid and solve conflicts, and make sure that all voices are heard. Each group must take enough time to identify their focus and build networks. This is one reason why all



groups – when they start – need to start with a facilitator who has skills and training in listening and engage in the alliance between group members, and can be a good mediator and even councilor when needed. All members in the participating farmer families should be committed to opening up their own farm to the group, and in many cases, they prepare the meeting together with the facilitator, as illustrated in the drawing above. Helping fellow farmer families in the group requires respect and trust. A FFLG will never work on one or few ‘demonstration farms’.



THE GROUP MEMBERS SHARE KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS:

Organic and agroecological farming requires deep insight and knowledge, to take a systems approach. Many groups showed clear evidence that the members as well as the entire group became empowered by sharing knowledge and insights. They often discovered how much they actually knew amongst themselves and how this knowledge could be helpful to their fellow group members. They also started identifying areas, where they felt that they needed more knowledge, and asked for it, either from the network of facilitators, or the organisation to which they were connected.



ALL AGE GROUPS ARE INCLUDED: The children need to be involved: they are the future of farming. They must learn and experience what farming entails.

There seems to be a worldwide gradual disconnect between the lives of children and young people on one side, and agricultural practice and farming on the other side. Children should not only experience the uniform tasks, e.g. always being the ones to pick water – but the complex system and the variety of tasks. Later, when they become young people / teenagers, they can have more responsibilities and experience that their knowledge is also valuable in the family. Some FFLGs also organize ‘youth-groups’ which can take care of special things like nursery or seedling production, bee-keeping or other tasks. Some FFLGs have membership from all family-members, and the children can sign in as members for example when they turn 15 years old. On the other end of the scale, the elderly people are carriers of knowledge and experience, which can be useful and should not be forgotten.

FFLGs MUST HAVE SKILLED FACILITATORS: Normally, a FFLG initiates

their existence as a FFLG with a facilitator, who has sufficient training and skills to mediate discussions and pay attention to everybody in the group, and set good examples in the way dialogues are carried out, and consensus is reached. It is important that the facilitator is actually not taking or accepting the role as a trainer. The facilitators should be

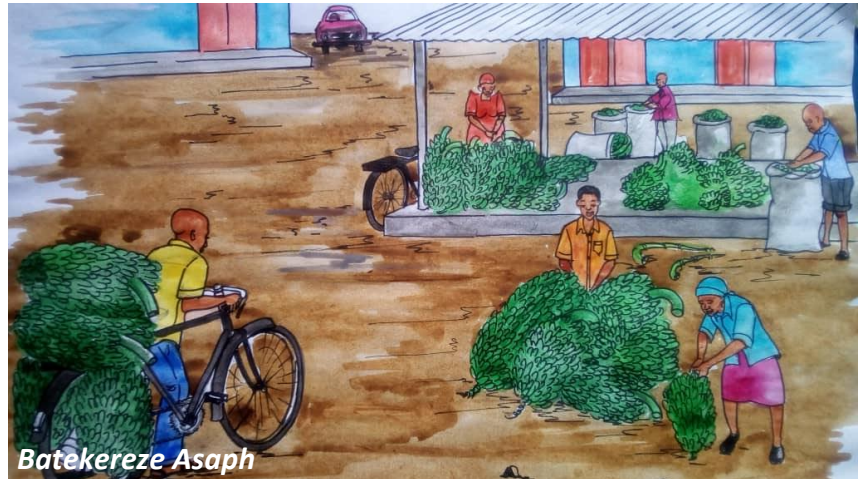


educated on how to allow the process of letting the group find their own pathway, and not ‘tell them what to do’, but help and guide the discussion, and for example use the network of people and capacities in the area, if there is need for additional knowledge. The alliance between the facilitator and the group needs to be clear: the group lets the facilitator moderate and guide the work, and the facilitator enters into dialogue with the group to identify modes of work and collaboration, and ways of communication within the group.

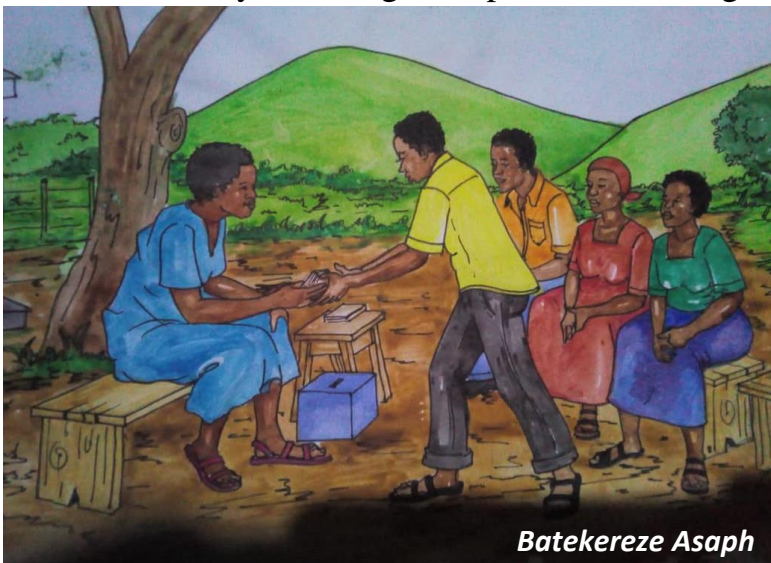
WHEN THE FFLG IS ESTABLISHED, THE GROUP MEMBERS WILL ELECT AN INTERNAL FACILITATOR AMONG THEMSELVES. HE/SHE WILL BE MENTORED BY THE EXTERNAL FACILITATOR: During the 10

years where this approach has been practiced, external facilitators were trained as facilitators, and they could initiate groups and help each group to select a so-called ‘internal facilitator’, who would then be guided and mentored by the external facilitator. The internal facilitator would be a part of the local community and would therefore stay with the group and be the daily facilitator.

Flexible implementation makes the FFLG approach relevant to all groups – no matter



where in the world the approach is used. The argument for flexibility is clear: different groups are faced with different circumstances and have different backgrounds. Some have small farms, some are close to roads, or live near towns and therefore have easy access to the market. Some have larger plots of land, good yields, and focus on certain cash crops. In these projects, some groups were formed in camps for internally displaced people, while others were communities of elderly or had many orphans – all these groups faced their own distinct challenges. It is therefore important that the groups can take different approaches in terms of prioritization of their issues, and in terms of both focus and structure. The majority of Farmer Family Learning Groups have a Savings and Credit (S&C) scheme. This



means that they save up money for example every week or every month (to their ability), to a box or account, from which group members can have a loan on agreed conditions. In some cases, the FFLG is part of a bigger S&C group, for example in an organisation of which they are members, or a network of FFLGs, or a Marketing Asso-

ciation (MA). The S&C element seemed to be a strong binding factor for the members of these schemes. It gave them an opportunity to save money for investments, and in addition, many S&C schemes included ‘urgent needs funds’ (e.g. school fees, or ‘disaster/emergency funds’ for hospital or health care needs).

PRINCIPLES OF FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUPS

THE ENTIRE FAMILY and household is involved

ROTATIONAL SYSTEM (of work and visits) involves all farm

ALL AGE GROUPS are included

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND TRUST is built between family members, and between members of the FFLGs

FFLGs must have **SKILLED FACILITATORS**:

- **THE EXTERNAL FACILITATOR** will normally help initiating the FFLG and mentor the internal facilitator,
- **THE INTERNAL FACILITATOR** is selected among and by the FFLG members.
- In addition, FFLGs normally organize themselves by electing a chair person, a secretary and one or two treasurers, and others if needed (e.g. quality assurance inspectors)

The group members **SHARE KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS**

Each group decides **OWN GOALS** and way of working, based on members’ capacities: **FLEXIBLE** approach

SAVINGS AND CREDIT is a part of the alliance between group members

JOINT MARKETING of produce can be a relevant activity, e.g. in a marketing association which involves one or more FFLGs.



The many layers and plants of a diversified agroecological farm

2. HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND ORGANIC AND AGRO-ECOLOGICAL FARMING IN UGANDA?

We define organic farming as the process of producing food, feed and fibre in a way, which conserves natural resources and maintains fertile soils, clean water and rich biodiversity. With organic farming, health is a key principle, aiming to build up healthy fertile soil, which can produce healthy plants, which in turn provide feed for healthy animals and food for healthy humans, based on locally available resources and avoiding the use of chemicals and genetically modified organisms. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) has formulated four important principles to guide the way an organic farm is organized. The principles have to be put into practice according to the relevant conditions and context. These four principles are:

1. **Principle of ecology:** Organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.

2. **Principle of care:** Organic agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.
3. **Principle of fairness:** Organic agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.
4. **Principle of health:** Organic agriculture should sustain the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.

A farming system is considered organic not just because no chemicals are used, but only when the non-chemical approach is combined with the conscious and context-relevant use of agricultural methods which focus on improving and enrich the whole agricultural and surrounding eco-system, and keep making the land more fertile with time. IFOAM's guiding principles can be used to evaluate whether a farming system is truly organic. Organic farming is often connected with certification, but does not necessarily have to be: it is defined by the way it operates. Many smallholder farmer families cannot afford to be organically certified. Nevertheless, a farm can be a good organic farm as long as the organic principles are implemented and good agro-ecological methods are practiced.

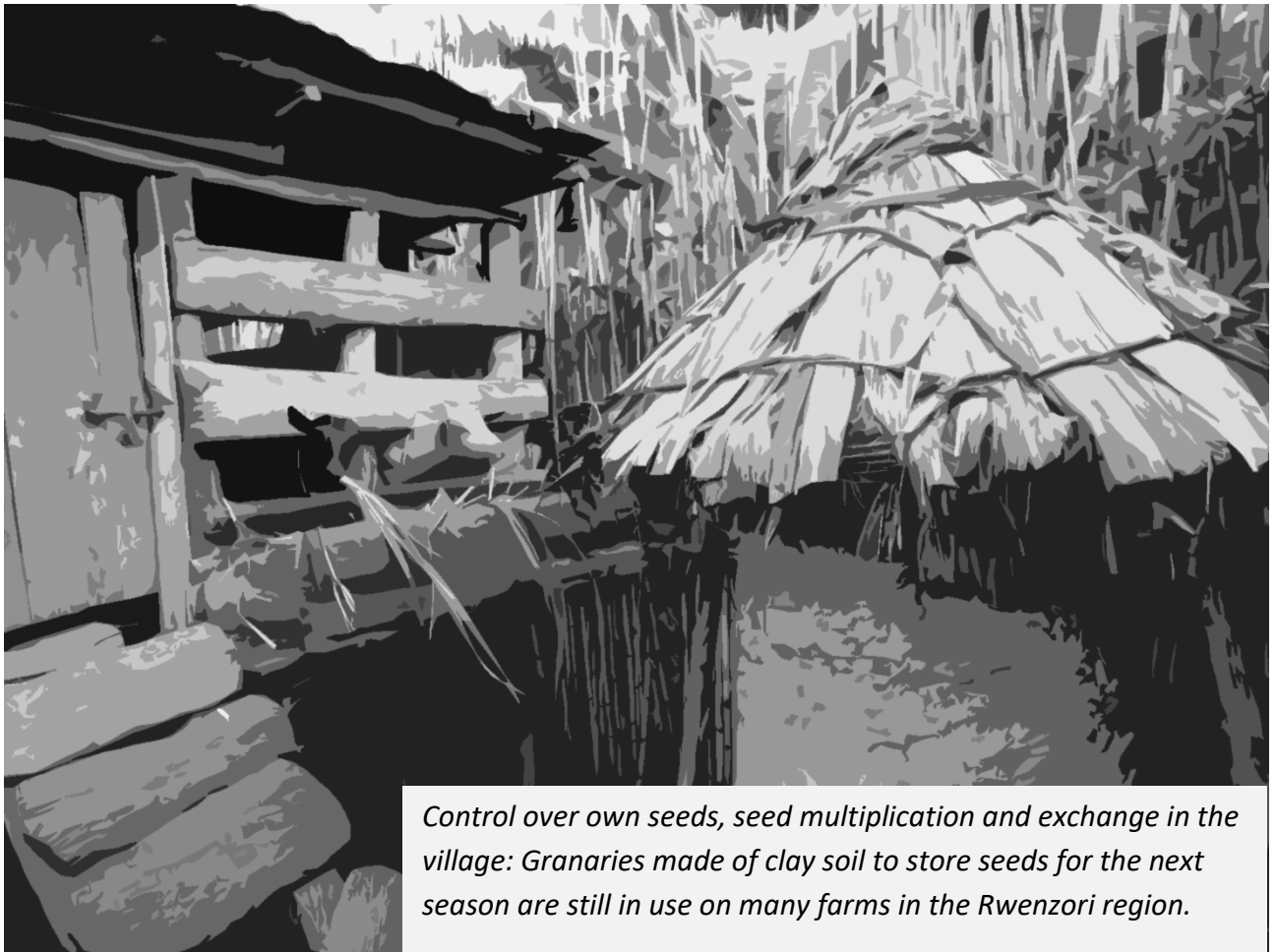
Agroecology is a worldwide used concept, often described both as a science, a way of practicing, and a social movement. The principles of agroecological farming are described by different actors, and the keywords below, which are underlined and in bold, are identified by some of the founding members of the concept of agroecology, inspired by the webpage http://www.agroecology.org/Principles_List.html, and for example Altieri et al. (2012a&b) and Gliessman (2015; see inside of backpage for references):

- **Resource recycling and minimizing losses**, where agroecological farms are working as resource-efficient and locally based farming systems, where losses of biomass, genetic and natural resources are minimized.
- **Minimal external inputs**, which is in the same time: emphasis on the use of local resources which enhance the environment: energy, human skills, capacities, and which are in accordance with the natural and social environment in a food system, hence 'internal inputs'. In agroecological farming, there is not a complete ban on use of external synthetic inputs, e.g. pesticides, but a constant aim of minimizing the use of external inputs. This

contributes to make the farming systems **contextualized**, meaning that farming systems are developed in each context with and by the actors, who carry and constantly co-create relevant knowledge.

- **Nourishing**: not only are the resources recycled, but the inputs are also non-destructive, and they even nourish soil, the environment, plants, animals, humans through healthy diets and clean air, water and environments, landscapes and ecosystems at all levels.
- **Resilience** is a key concept, both related to the natural, human and community adaptive capacity, in terms of ability to absorb shocks and disturbances, and stay healthy and immune. This emphasizes **diversity** and diversification, and **multi-functionality**. A multifunctional farming system has ability and capacity to carry out multiple different functions. This emphasizes the importance of **complexity and integration**, where interactions and synergies are enhanced in the social-ecological systems.
- **Equitable**: Increasing focus within the agroecological movement has been put on the equity element, and the necessity of clever use of human resources and mutuality within the system, valuing different capacities and knowledge types and no exploitation, as well as acting in ways which nourish and allow future generations to develop and flourish.

Organic and agroecological farming should not be confused with traditional farming, because organic and agroecological farming is based on an aim of constantly feeding the soil and leaving the land more fertile for the next generation. This can be – but is not always - the case in traditional farming. Many traditional farmers, for example, adopt the slash-and-burn system, which is not a good agroecological practice, especially not in situations as in Uganda today, where there is huge population increase and pressure on land, as well as degradation of natural resources. However, traditional farming is often based on indigenous knowledge – and much of this knowledge is very relevant and useful in organic and agroecological farming. Local knowledge and local knowledge generation is crucial for shaping organic and agroecological farming in any given context. Synergy effects should be maximized, at all levels of the farm. The graphical photo at the top of this chapter shows a farm where multiple plants from the high shade trees to the roots, like yam, all contribute to create a diversified food producing garden.



3. FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUPS INCREASE RESILIENCE

We understand resilience as a system's ability to – in one way or another – respond or react to a shock or disturbance, with an outcome of 'maintaining functions'. The concept emerged in ecosystem science and psychology, and gradually in many other fields, e.g. physics, political sciences and economics. In this chapter we understand it in relation to social, environmental, farming systems, financial and other areas of life related to farming. Creating and maintaining resilience at all levels has been a main focus in the FFLGs, and organic and agroecological farming explicitly addresses resilience at all levels.

It is important to note that resilience is a systems response, no matter whether we talk about psychological, social or financial resilience, or resilience in relation to ecosystems. It is also important to remember that resilience necessarily has to be described as dynamic processes that happen over time, and therefore never can be illustrated in 'still photos', and the time frames for determining whether something

is ‘resilient’ depends on the context. Whether resilience is about a system absorbing, adapting, tolerating change or able to remain unaffected, also depends on the situation and the type of disturbance, and it can also be seen as a transformation process where a system (e.g. a farming system or a social group) becomes able to work under changed conditions.

Farming system resilience

Increase in farming systems resilience was generally observed throughout the ten years of FFLG projects periods, in terms of diversification and improved soil fertility. The farmers generally increased their use of many farming practices, such as their use of compost, intercropping, different types of bio-pesticides, and securing the topsoil from erosion by digging trenches and planting the edges.



Box 3.1. Water resilience is important for keeping up the agricultural production, but water tanks are expensive and therefore often achieved through joint efforts, approaching organisations or governmental institutions, like here in Umoja (a FFLG connected to SATNET). Almost all farms were rain fed, which makes them vulnerable to climate change and changing rain patterns. It was approached in many ways, both by minimizing water loss and evaporation through compost, mulching and improving soil structure, and by making good use of rain water in mandala gardens, or by digging trenches to let the rain water soak into the soil, or in other ways directing the rain water.

According to an external evaluation report from 2014, food production increased generally among the FFLG’s members, up to 50% to 85% at farm level. Exact figures, measures and recordings to support this, do not exist. We base it on several interviews and reports throughout the project period. There was not only focus on the amount of food produced, but also the continuous increase of diversification of crops, plants and trees, and a dual focus on family food and cash crops. This diversification is in a way a result of increased resilience in the household (e.g. capacity, labor and time), and it contributes to more ecological and financial

resilience. The examples in the boxes illustrate the multiple perspectives on and ways of increasing farming systems resilience.



Box 3.2 Agricultural diversity gives a varied diet, potentials for a diversified income, and resilience: if one crop fails, you have others, so ‘don’t put all your eggs in one basket’. Family food can be combined with cash crops, nutritious greens, nitrogen fixation plants, herbs, and animals (e.g. chicken). Intercropping and crop rotation – e.g. on compost intensive highbeds – help diversifying the farm, enhance soil fertility and pest control, and use synergy between plants.

Box 3.3 Building a latrine with a ‘tippy-tap’: a facility outside to wash hands after a toilet visit, significantly improved not only the human health and feeling of dignity of the family members, but it also improved the farm resilience by creating less risk for everybody of spreading of pathogens and medicine residuals.



Build social capital and create social resilience

In the FFLG-projects, we understood social capital as the willingness of everybody to sacrifice and invest time and other resources to a community, to the benefit of everybody including themselves. The importance of building social capital in the groups and the community proved to be enormous. Many groups narrated that they had restored something valuable, which their local community had lost half or one

generation ago, and which they may never have experienced in their own lifetime. The social capital took many forms, e.g. from working together on equal basis on the farms, sharing ideas and knowledge about farming and other issues, to start marketing products together, to divide tasks between them in the group, such that one person for example produced liquid manure or herb-based bio-pesticides for the other group members. As will be unfolded more in the following chapters, also seed saving increasingly became a joint community or FFLG activity, as well as joining forces in advocacy efforts. The concept of social capital has many other facets, and the understanding of social capital as an asset in the livelihood framework will often add the dimensions of securing institutional frameworks for lasting change on a wider societal scale. We do not underestimate social capital as paramount and instrumental for meeting challenges related to power inequities at institutional levels. However, in relation to FFLGs, we worked more actively with social capital at ‘micro levels’ such as households / families, group and community levels, and framed the more societal and institutional aspects under the advocacy efforts of FFLGS and organisations using the FFLG approach.

Box 3.4 Factors mentioned by FFLG members to explain why their communities had lost social capital and cohesion.

- Migration of people: new groups and people coming into the area, but also migration out of the area, e.g. men as migrant workers in nearby or distant towns
- Conflicts in the area followed by disturbances and displacements of people,
- Increased population pressure on land,
- Alcoholism followed by disruption of social structures in families,
- The younger generation abandoned a future as farmers and showed no interest in farming

When looking through the lenses of resilience, social resilience can be understood as the ability of FFLGs or communities to absorb shock and changes and re-organize when necessary in relevant ways, so that the people could still maintain and improve their lives, livelihood, surroundings and communities. We experienced groups where the members worked together and assisted each other in difficult life situations (as for example mentioned in boxes 3.12 and 5.2, and in the booklet: ‘The Rwenzori Experience’ (<http://www.twn.my/title/end/pdf/end15.pdf>)).

At a wider scale, increasing effects of climate change influenced many communities, and to adapt to these challenges, a joint effort and common knowledge generation

were often shown to be key for ‘staying on track’ as individual human beings, farmer families as well as communities.

Box 3.5. The Kisa Kya Maria FFLG, connected to Caritas Kampala, told about social capital: they cared for each other, e.g. made sick visits, and helped each other if some had some specific challenges. This made their little community strong, and gave significant benefits to each member. Being members and part of FFLGs were about living together in a community: ‘A FFLG is not only about farming, but about living as friends in a society.’ The group also mentioned ‘cohesion between families in a village’ as one of the major achievements.

All members participated in a FFLG at equal level, meaning that they all were hosts for the group, when it did its rotational visits, and they all contributed when they met at other farms. This created an alliance and mutual respect between the FFLG members, which not only contributed to generating common learning, but also created social bonds. Building social capital in a group means that all contribute and sometimes stretch a bit to help community members and the community as a whole – this does not mean that all were expected to contribute with the same type of skills, knowledge, labor or any other inputs. It meant rather the opposite: everybody contributed with what they could do, and the group consisted of these many different capacities and skills. In this way, 2 + 2 became more than 4. One of the women in a FFLG expressed it in the following way in a group focus interview: *‘Livestock keeping is one of the big achievements. And I can support education of the family’s children now. I have been able to pay medication. I am an elderly woman, and I cannot join the labor, but still the group gives me support: ‘I believe that they are the ones contributing to my being’.*

Farmers in many FFLGs went together and made bricks for houses, and they built them. In that way, they planned to move from farm to farm, and build a house for every member. This is similar to examples of some FFLGs, where some skilled members introduced wood saving stoves, and they helped each other to build them in the kitchens of all members. In Box 3.6, a photo of a trench dug by the members of a Farmer Family Learning Group shows a concrete example of FFLG members contributing to each household by e.g. building houses or giving direct money to the host family. Examples like these were given by a lot of groups, and it could be mentioned under ‘financial resilience’ as well – the point is that more or less all forms for resilience in one way or another comes back to social capital and coherence. However, this is a clear example: it requires strong coherence and social

capital in a group or within a community to believe in it and that the effort will be of mutual benefit. Everybody invests a lot of work building a house, a shed or establish a plantation for a fellow farmer, or give direct money to another family. While doing this, they have to either believe that it will be their turn one day to benefit, or to remember that they benefitted some time ago and therefore invest their time and effort in bringing a fellow household up to the same level.

Box 3.6. Most FFLGs started their activities building trenches for every household. Building trenches and ditches is a tough job, which is made so much easier when joining forces and seeing quick progress. In the Rwenzori region, many farms occupied very steep land, and therefore, trenches were necessary to avoid losing top soil, and to get the most out of the rainwater.



The most significant result at family level of involving whole households in the FFLGs was the way in which each household member opened his or her eyes for everybody's abilities and potentials. The household members started appreciating each other, and discussing things on their farm, and discussing investments and priorities. Both at family and at group level, everybody realized how much further they could reach with a joint effort, and when helping each other, they also achieved a lot themselves.

Contributing to resilient communities beyond the FFLG

The FFLG approach enables a holistic and long-term development and problem solving in local communities. Although the main focus of discussion was agriculture, broader social and community issues such as gender based violence, hygiene and sanitation, bad roads, lack of stores and school infrastructure were taken up as issues which the FFLG could do something about – and often they did. There were also a number of examples where the community resilience were strengthened

beyond the group and its member families themselves, as illustrated in boxes 3.7 and 3.8.

Box 3.7. The company Sulma Foods Ltd. saw the benefit of strong communities, and therefore outreach to local communities and community work was perceived as a matter of social responsibility. The FFLGs in Sulma Foods Ltd. had done quite a lot of community work, which gave a good background for advocating for better roads. Roads in this area are crucial for trucks and lorries, which came and picked the produce. Every Wednesday, community work was going on in many of the FFLGs, where they among others improved the local road, and that was very convincing and attractive for the government which invested in improving the road systems. This approach created a good interaction between company interests and businesses on one side, and social responsibility on the other hand, as explained by the managing director: *'When we see projects that benefit the farmers, then we take it on, even when it has no direct benefit to the company' because this strengthen our bond with these FFLGs.*

A major benefit of investing in the community as a whole, beyond the FFLG group and their members, is to create trust and peace within the community, which contributes to the safety and feeling of security and protection of everybody.

Box 3.8. An example of a relatively small marketing association, Nyakabingo Farmers United, which was a Marketing Association under SATNET, had an explicit goal of influencing the entire community positively, beyond the company and the farmer groups connected to it, and their households. Many of the members did voluntary work in the community. Nyakabingo started a carpentry training for young men to give them additional ways of earning money. Later they likewise invested in some sewing machines and training for young mothers. They built a nursery to improve on their coffee production. First they multiplied seedlings of their best coffee variety for all farms and after that the nursery was used to produce seedling of beneficial trees, like Grevilla, to give shade in the coffee plantations. This Marketing Association was also a recognized group in the community, and the members interacted with neighbors too. They had a broad view on how things were interrelated, as expressed by the external facilitator: *'we work for a generally improved livelihood, food security, fighting poverty, reduce domestic violence and support each other – all these are interrelated'*. They were also aware to think of the future, and make something, which could last: *'We are not working for ourselves here, but for the young generation. We know that we are not remaining here, but hope to throw the light out to the next generation.*

Multiple FFLG members expressed that they felt that they had got an extended family in the group, can in some ways be extended to the community. Besides, a lot of other benefits such as knowing who are resource persons regarding specific matters, can contribute to lifting the entire community to a higher level. The recognition by the local politicians and organisations are also strengthened, when a small community gets well-known for its capacities and abilities.

Examples of visioning ‘how can we create change in our community’

In many FFLGs planning for the future was a central element, and every group had a ‘vision’ regarding what they wanted to reach in the future, on the levels of households, FFLGs and sometimes wider local community.

Box 3.9. The SATNET-connected organisation Umoja had developed a method of visioning together, where the group sat together and were drawing ‘the before-situation’, ‘the present situation’, and finally ‘the vision on what they would like to reach’. This gave them a common understanding of the change that had happened, and strengthened their common goal and vision for the future efforts.



In Box 3.9, an example is given of how the SATNET-based organisation Umoja used a method for creating a common understanding of the change, which they had already undergone, and combined it with a vision on where they would like to go. The organisation URDT, situated in the Midwestern part of Uganda, worked with multiple focus areas and activities regarding health, agriculture, and in particular education of young girls from Primary School to University level. The connection between this focus and the FFLG approach was among others that the university students served the organisation by doing community work, which also became a part of their education for life. URDT has a structure with what they named ‘Epi-

Centres' (local networks) in all sub counties, each with an epi-center manager. The epicenter managers also take the roles of external facilitators for FFLGs. In January 2018, when we collected material for this booklet, URDT had 73 FFLGs all with internal facilitators. Many groups had applied to be connected to this network on FFLG, because they saw positive changes happening in the FFLGs. URDT had chosen 'visioning' as a main approach to the process where each particular person, household or FFLG should identify what they wanted to reach. This visioning process is described in Box 3.10.

Box 3.10. A strong element in the URDT approaches, was a conscious visioning process at different levels:

- First, each person had to 'speak with his or her inner person' and think of the visions which he or she could imagine for the future.
- After this, the family would sit together and create their common vision. So, each family had a common vision, which they will reach together. -
- When they established the FFLGs, this process became meaningful as a part of the FFLG process. The persons, households and groups could combine their individual and common visions with actually tools and collaboration to realise their visions: Each FFLG sat together and developed a common vision, based on each member's and household's different visions.

The group had a monitoring team, which visited and monitored the households. They explained that the visioning process helped them to not only 'do planning', but actually reach consensus on a long-term vision about where they wanted to be, and follow it up as a group.

When the concept of FFLG was introduced in the organisation, it was found to be a very relevant method for finding the common goals of the group, including how the group saw themselves in the local community. URDT saw the FFLG approach as a very efficient approach, and the combination of making visions and implementing it in practice was very good.

The structures with the internal and external facilitators was good, and as organisation, URDT could easily reach all farmers. It fitted well with the other activities of the organisations: organic agriculture, good health, and not least education of girls / young women. The overarching method of the organisations was the activity that they were running several schools in the local area, introducing school gardens, and teaching the pupils about organic farming.

Financial resilience

The Farmer Family Learning Groups gave a robust background for financial resilience through various forms of ‘Savings & Credit’ schemes (S&C), which was applied in most of the FFLGs in member organisations of SATNET as well as in the other organisations, which used the FFLG approach. The structures of S&C were different in terms of membership conditions and how flexible they were with what everybody saved per week, or they were in some cases divided in ‘emergency funds’ and ‘long-term-loans’. These schemes exist in very many forms throughout the world, and is as such far from unique for the FFLGs, and many groups, which developed into becoming FFLGs, had started as small Savings & Credit (S&C) groups.

Box 3.11. Kanyamura Twekambe Marketing Association is a relatively small member association of SATNET, which has built financial resilience through diversifying enterprises to ensure food and income for the members throughout the year. The group has diversified the crops as they have seen market opportunities within the area and outside the district, e.g. an opportunity to sell garlic to Kampala. Each member chooses the crops they want to grow according to their land and working capacity and of course in agreement with the MA. The group members live in a rather hilly area in The Rwenzori.

This hilly area has the potential to be in production for different crops all year-round. The group operates a joint store at the local trading center for joint marketing of their different products. The store is used for example to store Irish potato, Arabica coffee, peas, and garlic - either at the same period, or at different periods of the year depending on the maturity period of the different crops. The group has a quality control committee, which inspects the quality of the produce on each farm before the produce is delivered to the joint store. Since the group deals in several products with good quality for which they have several markets, they have been able to always negotiate the best prices for the different products for their members. In case one crop, e.g. peas, failed either at production or in price fall, the group is assured to compensate from the garlic or Irish potato price boom. In whichever uncertainty, the group members expressed that they always found a way to move forward, in accordance with diversified alternatives.

Others started as FFLGs and took up the S&C element, realizing that it contributed significantly to the livelihoods and the possibilities of farmer families to develop, for example by being able to send all children to school, and invest, for example in tools, housing for animals and household utensils. In addition, having access to small emergency loans, it gave a feeling of security in terms of help to medical care and

other emergency situations. Everybody became a bit more flexible - resilient – and one used the short sentence: *'It is expensive to be poor'*, to explain the benefits of being able to access loans.

Compared to the more established microcredit systems, they generally found these S&C schemes more uncomplicated and direct. The more established microcredit systems had many challenges in terms of big fees, which they had to pay in advance when taking the loan, and up to e.g. 3% interest per month. Their own systems gave them more full control, and more immediate reactions, although it also had its

Box 3.12. Doing things as a group – the importance of planning and diversifying the efforts and 'not put all eggs in one basket'. In the SATNET member organisation Umoja, the members worked together, and assisted each other in difficult life situations. Several elements of their strategies were supporting their sustainability, such as:

- involvement of the youth through a special youth group.
- they had very little land per household, so their strategy was to diversify their production and activities, and had multiple products as well as chicken and goats.
- In their common garden, they grew maize, dodo, seed, tomatoes (organic small ones, which were quite pest resistant), local seeds of Irish potatoes and beans), and ability to mobilize a variety of food for events like weddings and burials, on request.
- not moving faster than they could manage,
- linking up with actors such as Integrated Seed Sector Development (ISSD), and the local governance system,
- they make a 2 and a 5-year plan and follow that, and review through participatory monitoring how they are doing. Their 2-year plan at the moment was 1) Finishing the storage room up to roofing, 6 million. 2) Mobilize 15 youth members who agree to work with us, and 3) mobilize and train farmers in local seed business. In their 5-year plan they also had focus on chicken and fish farming, as well as Irish Potatoes and vanilla as commercial crops.

They trained the members in post-harvest handling, to improve the quality of the produce, and they trained them in record keeping at home, to improve their skills for planning and budgeting. So far, they estimated that about 20% of the households kept records at home.

challenges in terms of management and trust. The term resilience is very much about 'not putting all the eggs in one basket', and the diversification strategy which was also an agro-ecological benefit, is definitely also a financial benefit.

This was illustrated in Box 3.11, where a Marketing Association constantly were alert to finding new market opportunities and in this way being able to expand and

balance between different produce. In Box 3.12, the way in which the Umoja group diversified their activities is presented: they covered all aspects of the community and in addition have a variety of produce which they sometimes could sell ‘in a collected package’ to events.

Box 3.13. An example of financial resilience through diversification of products:

In January 2018, there was a meeting at Namuganga FFLG in the organisations Africa 2000 Network Uganda (A2N; www.a2n.org.ug/)



Talking about making the group resilient also in terms of income, group members told about how the young people in the group had taken new initiatives to earn money. The entire group was diverse: some very young, some elderly, and they had deliberately shaped the groups so that the 30 households, which were members of this FFLG, represented a range of different capacities and needs, so that they could help each other. They highlighted the benefits of becoming members of the FFLG, and told that they had improved their food security by changing to the organic agricultural practices, but importantly, the FFLG approach brought friendship, collective impact, sanitation, kitchen garden and Savings & Credit Scheme. They grew banana, coffee, maize, rosemary and vegetables for joint sale. They have started seed multiplication of maize, and they had started value addition like coffee processing, jam and juice from avocado, tomato and pineapple. Especially the young people looked for new markets outside the village, and they were situated very near a bigger town, so they had started to make crafts for sale to get more fast money, but also increased prices for their produce, such as 15.000 Ush per bunch of matooke, where they previously had got something like 3000 Ush.

Family food resilience and sovereignty

The diversification and increased production helped creating nourishing and varied diets and better food security. Building social capital in local communities is a key to control over food, and the families are important institutions in reaching food sovereignty. It was a shared experience in the project that empowerment of women

best happened through empowerment of families. The families started making book keeping and records. This made it visible for everybody in the family how they spent their money, and it opened the opportunity to discuss investments and future priorities. The family involvement had the benefit that many young people became increasingly interested in farming, and became more skilled and more involved in the activities and decisions on the farm. We also saw in many communities that the husbands returned to the farms, because they became more interested in farming and found possibilities to earn money from the farm. The household members shared views on their perceptions regarding agriculture, food, markets and strategies. Apart from growing family food, two main strategies strengthened the local control over food: a) selling surplus of own production on local markets, and b) forming Marketing Associations to gain better prices of the same product, which are specifically sold as cash crop, as explained in more details elsewhere.

Farmer Family Learning Groups in a peri-urban setting

Caritas Kampala implemented the project in Wakiso district, which is in central Uganda and quite close to Kampala. Pressure on land in Wakiso district is high hence making food security a challenge for a large number of smallholder farmer families. At the time of compiling material for this booklet, there were about 120 FFLGs in Caritas Kampala, and about 70 of them had explicit organic agriculture focus. The location in a semi-urban area created a special approach, because many had jobs in town, in addition to their farming. The location so close to a major city also had the

Box 3.14. Many farms had small gardens, especially when there was lack of land close to towns and cities. Some families relied on a quarter to half an acre for their food security, and in some cases a piece of land at a distance. The families grew herbs, vegetables and fruits, and some matooke bananas. They used sack mounds and intercropping. However, many complained that they had not land enough to grow food. However, in the FFLGs they also realized that many households did not use the opportunity fully and had a lot of space between their vegetables, as one of the project facilitators said: *'I see a lot of space where people tell me there is no space'*. They constantly tried to improve their gardens through their interactions.

consequence that the gardens were small, and work was distributed in a certain way in the families. There was often an additional household income. Most households had a few animals; pigs, rabbits, goats, or chicken. The location near a city also means special market opportunities, e.g. special types of salad and vegetables that always become popular in cities rather than in the rural areas. The economic

activities also included fishing on Lake Victoria, production of poultry feeds, and agriculture with the emphasis on food crops like bananas, cassava, beans, groundnuts, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, and soy beans. Cash crops included coffee and cotton, and fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, onions and cabbage,



Box 3.15. The FFLG Kisa Kya Maria (which was member of Caritas Kampala) had a diverse community garden of 1 acre of land. They managed it as a group: each household took turns on Saturdays: weeding, harvesting and preparing products to be sent to the market. It was easy to find markets with these volumes. The children worked and helped in the garden with their parents. Apart from this, members marketed their produce together. It was not organized at a larger scale, but mostly so that two or few farmers went together to the market. Sometimes they bulked and buyers came to the group, when they had produce of high quality. The group had a Marketing committee who searched the market, and a Quality committee, which assessed the quality of different products marketed by farmers.

were grown. The location close to a town also meant a good market for the products from their community garden, as described in Box 3.15.

Seed sovereignty

Several aspects of local control over seed were taken up in the FFLGs, and in the period of these projects from 2008-2018, there was a significant increase in

awareness of the value of the importance of keeping local and more resistant varieties of vegetables as well as staple foods, and keeping the control over seeds.

At the end of the projects, many groups worked with aspects of seed harvesting, conservation, multiplication and exchange in all the organisations. Depending on the structures of the FFLGs or wider group such as Marketing Associations, NGO or company, the seeds were collected and exchanged in different ways. At the level of FFLG, the example from 2010 in Box 4.2 about the elders being knowledge carriers, giving their knowledge and skills to younger generations also serves as an example of sharing seeds at FFLG level.

Box 3.16 about Nyamughasana Valley Farmers' Cooperative, which distributed 30 kg of *Mucuna pruriens* beans to 30 farmers in the mountain for soil erosion control and goat feed, in 2017. In March 2019 each of the thirty farmers had over 25 kg of seeds, and had given some seeds to at least one farmer. An initiative for marketing this seed is underway. The same cooperative has a seed multiplication initiative for castor oil (*Ricinus communis*), which is a fast growing tree used as shade in the coffee. The cooperative buys back the extra castor oil seeds to process it into medicinal oil, and distribute the seed to more farmers. This is an FFLG initiative that is now organized at cooperative level to create resilient coffee farming systems on the smallholder farmer families in the Rwenzori mountains.

SATNET and its member organisations worked with seed multiplication, as shown in the example in Box 3.16. Through such exchange system, the farmers got access to seed and shade trees like *Ricinus communis*, which improved the resilience of coffee farming for a lot of smallholder families in the region.

Box 3.17 about informal seed exchange: Many FFLGs, like the Kisa Kya Maria FFLG in Caritas, had not yet organized a seed bank, but were interested and worked to learn about it. So far, they practiced a more informal exchange of seed and nursery plants. The group members had got increasingly interested in seeds and plants of different types, and of good quality. They had not yet made it into a group activity, but it was organized more like exchange among members:

- As individuals, they shared and exchanged between households,
- As a group arrangement, they bought seeds together and made nurseries,
- They reached out to non-members if they showed interested.

FFLGs connected to SATNET often focused on open pollinated varieties and vegetative propagated crops such as beans, cassava, banana, and agroforestry trees,

and multiplied seed selected by their group preferences while avoiding genetically modified seed. They followed criteria such as, suitability of seed, ecological, economic and social acceptability of seed, taste, yield, nutrition, resilience etc. Harvesting and saving seeds at FFLG-level had the potential to make each household diversify their diets in their homes through accessing a broader range of food types, and to keep local varieties of the crops on the hands of the farmers.

Box 3.18. Sulma Foods Ltd. started a seed multiplication, which included beans and sucker multiplication, for example banana suckers and small trees or seedlings of avocado. Farmers, who participated in the seed multiplication project found that it was necessary and had a major impact on their possibilities to access different foods on their farms, and they benefitted a lot. The whole program was managed by the facilitators' network, which is explained in Figure 6.1. They organized it so that farmers, who received seeds would multiply them and pass them on to other farmers in a network. In addition, the company produced seedlings for distribution.

Often, they found that their local seeds were more robust, even in the changed weather patterns. Many emphasized also that the varieties which they used to grow, were tastier and different types e.g. of tomatoes could be used for different foods. The example in Box 3.18 is an example of a group, which sees the value of a more organized seed exchange system, but has started in a more informal way as a beginning. They also saved money, because they did not need to buy seeds. Box 3.19 gives an example from Nyarwe – a SATNET member organisation, which organized a quite large-scale seed multiplication, which turned out to be good business for both, FFLG and farmers. It offered a better price for seed than on the local market but also offered farmers an opportunity of quality declared seed where it is easily accessible and at half price of the more centralized seed dealers.

Box 3.19. Nyarwe was operating in a predominantly maize monocrop area, and the members realised that they spent a lot of money on buying beans as a food source. They also experienced that the fertility of their land was at stake, because maize was heavily consuming all the nutrients in the soil. The group facilitator had knowledge of soil fertility enhancement through integration of legume crops of which beans was a best fit for this situation. Farmers realised that the bean seeds from certified companies was far too expensive for them but was of good quality. As an FFLG, Nyarwe decided to start with 50 kg Nabe-4 foundation seed (which are quality assured bean seeds), and start multiplying at their joint group garden from which they started giving the Nabe-4 seed to the FFLG members. They maintained the joint seed multiplication garden and registered their group to start selling seed as quality declared seed, and had multiplied considerable amounts.

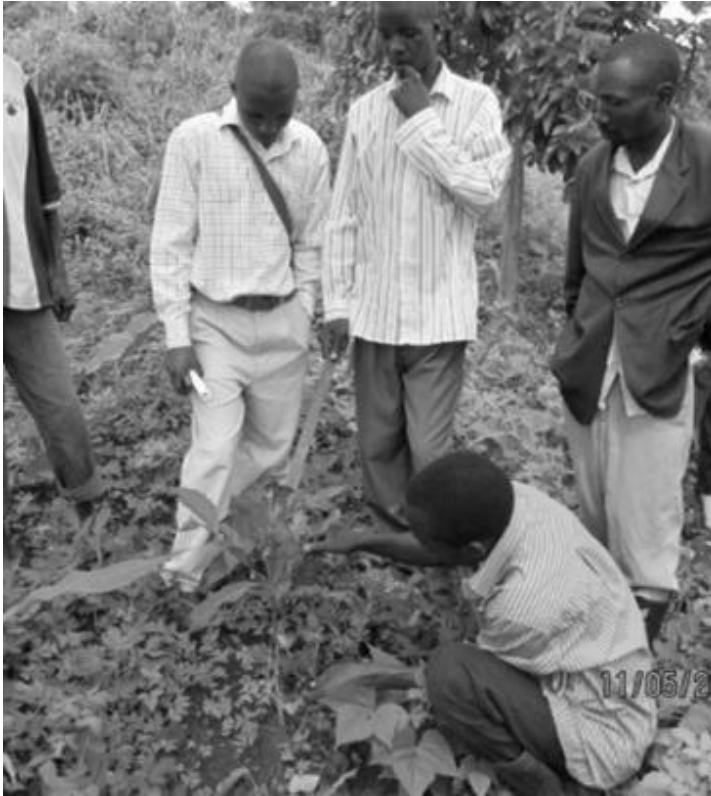


4. FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUPS GENERATES KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Agroecological and organic farming is knowledge intense. Growing good nourishing food requires skills. Interacting with others in the communities in ways, which generates feelings of confidence and safety, openmindedness and care, needs social skills, which can only be cultivated in groups and communities. FFLGs support many dimensions of knowledge and skill exchange and generation, from building up technical knowledge and sustainable practices about agriculture, food, to social networking.

Learning across age groups and gender

The FFLG approach involving whole households, including more generations (whole families) gave a lot of opportunities for learning across generations, and listening to each other. The youngest generations often could contribute with school



Box 4.1. A key principle on learning in FFLGs is that ‘everybody is a learner, on equal level’. Everybody should participate and dare to show what they needed to know more about. This does not mean that everybody learns the same thing, but learn the things which are relevant for him or her, and contribute in the discussions about questions which the group members are commonly exploring, as well as issues which they have experience with and therefore can feed in with experienced knowledge. Nobody carries ‘the one and only truth and solution’.

knowledge and skills, and in many families, only the youngest could write and read, which gave them an important role in record keeping. In many villages, there was a need to learn across age groups and gender, because many men had left for work in cities, and therefore the people (elders, women and children) left behind in the village, had to learn new skills, as is the case in every era of



Box 4.2: Intergenerational learning: The woman to the left had immense knowledge about herbs and medicinal plants, which was widely spread, and which FFLG members took up. To the right, an example from the first project in SATNET, where FFLG members started harvesting, saving and exchanging seeds. The elderly people carried the knowledge about how to mix ashes or burned cow dung into seed after drying them, and store them in bags of banana fibers to hang under the roof.

change. It is important to emphasize that the approach of FFLGs was not about women and men learning all the same things. Many tasks were considered to be responsibilities of either men or women. These patterns were sometimes brought up to discussion. Nevertheless, in many cases, men and women also did different tasks, e.g. the men often did primary cultivation of the land and built constructions, whereas women often planted and weeded.

Learning in different contexts - 'one size does not fit all'

The important point of learning here is, that the fact that these tasks were discussed, and experience exchanged, made everybody think of them as skillful and important, and the mutual respect and recognition increased. It was a key approach in the FFLG that farmer families should not learn from 'central learning plots', but from their own farms.

The difficulty of learning from a 'demonstration garden' is to translate the learned into something useful for one's own farm, if for example one does not have access to the tools which are available at the demonstration plot.



Box 4.3. The fact that all group members – women, men, children – walk freely around on each other's farms creates a valuable alliance of trust and mutuality between group members. This was strongly connected to a good learning environment. Everybody sees and experiences other farms, and every farm is unique. Yet, they share challenges, and they connect where they are now, and where they want to go, and they see many different ways of transferring the knowledge, which they had learned. That is a constant source of inspiration, for every member: 'Wow, it's nice here – tell me, what are you doing?'

Using the FFLG-approach, everybody's farm reality became a part of the learning, and people saw that their colleagues and fellow farmers in many ways struggled with the same issues as themselves, and in many cases had found solutions that others in the group could learn from. Furthermore, the practical setting in the 'daily life farms' often brought to surface more relevant issues, than if an advisor had come with a predetermined agenda, or they had learned something in a classroom. According to the evaluation of the projects, interviews showed that it was often considered embarrassing, if a household had not put recommendations in effect by the next visit.

Everybody is a resource person, and complementary skills are developed in and between FFLGs

In a FFLG, people of different age groups, gender and backgrounds come together



Box 4.4. The farm planning was emphasized very much especially in the first established FFLGs in the member organisations of SATNET. This gave a great learning for everybody involved: first, the households saw how many options they had, even if they felt stuck in financial constraints and lacked skills. Secondly, many found it quite life changing to invite other farmer families into the farm and present their plan for them, and hear their ideas and suggestions.

and start interacting. They discover complementary skills, and that everybody can learn something. The model where a resource person has to be called and come to a village or group and teach them, is turned upside down: the group can reach very far. As illustrated in Box 4.5, farmers could train fellow farmers, and together they could learn, not only technical skills, but also new strategies and ways of

improving their livelihoods and develop their farms, both as farmers and as groups.

Box 4.5. Farmers in Sulma Food Ltd. expressed that the capacity building, facilitated by the company, enabled them to train fellow farmers. They had built new skills during the past years, regarding at least three dimensions:

- They have focused on technical skills to grow relevant and diverse crops, and become organic farmers
- They have learned from each other, which is also building social capital and learned them to benefit from being a community,
- They have learned more about marketing strategies, as a group, and together with Sulma Foods.

This had contributed to better food security among the member families, and they had experienced higher incomes. They now saw all food crops as cash crops too, and moved from subsistence farming to more commercial farming, and as stated in their own words: *'We have gained experience and moved from subsistence farming and been more commercial and become organic farmers'*.

Not only the farmers realized that they actually had a lot of capacities and skills in a FFLG: this was also noticed among many of the facilitators, who developed other roles than 'training farmers', as the example in Box 4.6 shows. Many facilitators noticed this development over the years, in all the organisations which worked with FFLGs, and some facilitators explained that they found it important that they kept following the groups to mentor and organize at a 'higher level'.

Box 4.6. CARITAS Kampala started with a few groups with an educated facilitator, but expanded the number by letting the educated facilitators mentor internal facilitators, who could gradually take over most of the tasks, as was the case in almost all FFLGs in all the organisations which worked with this approach. This gave the extension people 'another lens on extension', and their roles as extension workers and advisors in the organisation had changed with this approach, as expressed by one of the people working in the organisation: *'Now the 'donkey-work' is relieved, so the farmers do it themselves. I'm putting on another lens on extension. Of course my bosses can start thinking 'what is his role?' but in a way it has grown bigger. Your role keep on developing per se... There is more interaction, more networking in this way.'*



Box 4.7. In the Rwenzori region, food was often cooked on open fire, which caused cough and other diseases among children and women, who spent much time in the kitchen. The techniques of building wood saving stoves with a chimney spread among groups, and every household got one in some of the FFLGs in the member organisations of SATNET.

Furthermore, we often saw facilitators of groups get together and interact, and in this way ‘cross pollinate’ between groups. As shown in the example in Box 4.7, building of the wood saving stoves can serve as an example of such an exchange, which spread rapidly between households and groups. In some groups, few of the members had acquired skills to build these stoves, and they build them in all households.

Exchange learning visits between facilitators showed to be a strong avenue for team building, exchange of knowledge, confidence building and practical learning. As can be read from the examples in Box 4.8, when facilitators visited each other, and could identify obvious possibilities for fruitful collaboration. During these exchange learning visits, the facilitators appreciate the situation of each other and the need for

co-creation of knowledge to adapt it to different situations. This equips the facilitator with diversified knowledge and experience.

Box 4.8 is telling a story about two different FFLGs – both members of SATNET MOs - and their facilitators brought their knowledge together and learned from each other. The FFLG Basyakulhu Bakekulhu of Kabingo Thukolethuthi had a lot of experience in preparing bio-rationals for agricultural enterprises e.g. treating goats, biological fungicides for tomatoes and human medicine. The members of another FFLG Bukangara United had learnt how to implement banana bacterial wilt management, which they had shown could wipe it out of their 28 farmer family banana plantations. These two FFLGs operated within an area of 9 km, but they had never interacted with each other. The facilitators of these two FFLGs went together and identified a lot of potentials in a closer collaboration, and organized a lot of events together, including supporting each other in record keeping.

When hosting other facilitators, the hosting FFLG also feels the impact of the recognition of their group, get new friends and motivation to do an effort.

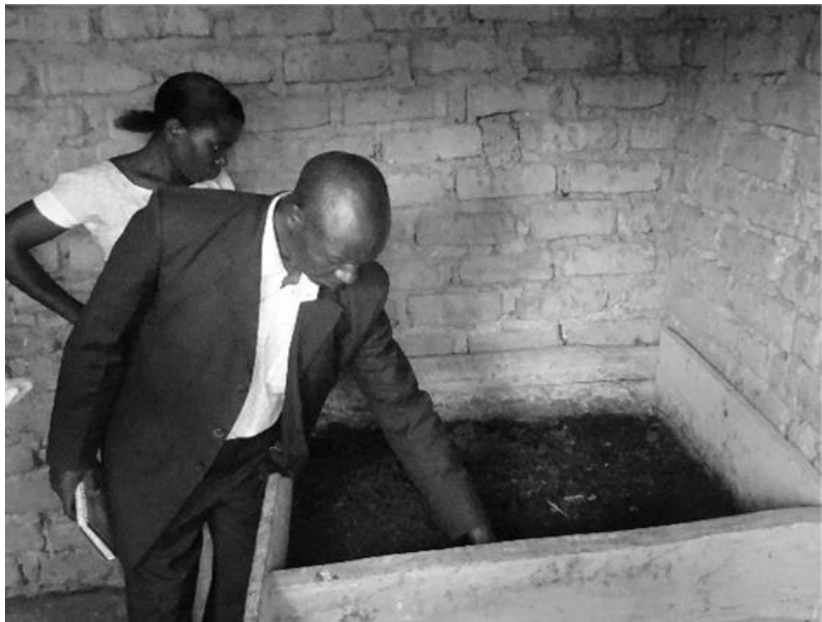
Knowledge generation and being innovative: finding new solutions

The Farmer Family Learning Groups exchanged knowledge and many household

Box 4.9 gives an example of one exchange learning visit, where 11 facilitators in different SATNET MOs shared knowledge on fall army worm management with the farmers in Rwekubembe Tukwatanize FFLG in Kamwenge. The facilitators and farmers from all over Kamwenge district were being affected by the fall army worm. This pest was new to all farmers and the agriculture extension staff in the entire country. Through knowledge sharing, the facilitators and farmers realised that the local maize variety were not susceptible to the fall army worm. Others shared about the feeding habits and life cycle of this pest and therefore when best to control it. They inspected affected gardens while sharing knowledge. They walked up and down the field to compare different parts of the field and how the pest infested the different spots of the same field. The ‘how’, ‘why’, ‘when’ and so on, of this disturbing pest were discussed. A lot was commonly realised, and when the facilitators got to their FFLGs they started to try the strategies that were discussed, such as early morning application of ash. The sharing continued on phone, and facilitators were mentoring each other regarding their new knowledge. After the visit, several facilitators were sharing experience of how they got great inspiration and that the agroecological methods shared were helping a lot in managing the new pest. The host facilitator expressed the greatness of hosting a team of skilled facilitators and that this was a big impact on their village and for him as a person gaining confidence and popularity in his community. As a result, he was being invited to radio talk shows about prevention of the fall army worm.

improved through the collaboration in physical, actual work but also knowledge and skills. Every group would reach some points where they need to develop new goals together to keep the dynamics and development; John Munene (who has been a great source of inspiration for the development of the concept on FFLGs) called this ‘Zone of proximal development’. Many groups reached such a point where they wanted to go further than any of the members had gone before. This could be starting to market things together, grow new crops, or take up new methods or techniques. In such cases, the group started searching for knowledge and expertise outside the group either because they needed help to get started, or in cases where they felt stuck.

Many of the organisations mentioned that farmers and farmer groups, who were now able to actually identify their needs for training and knowledge, was a good sign of progress and development in many farms and villages. The examples with one group member making experiments with vermi-compost (Box 4.10), and the organisation linking up to an organisation to experiment with different local bean varieties (Box 4.11) are examples of such developments. Many examples of initiatives could be given, e.g. the facilitator of the MA Nyarwe experiment-



Box 4.10. One of the farmer families in Kyaminyoku United (a FFLG, connected to SATNET), made experiments with vermi-compost in two chambers. In Box 4.13 it is explained that the inspiration came from an exposure visit in Nairobi. This systems work in the way that worms work for about 2 months. After this, the compost is ready to be applied, but the worms will have to move over to a neighbor chamber first. This is done by collecting compost material in the second chamber, and remove the cover from the first chamber, so that it dries out a bit. This makes the worms move to the more moist material, after removing the wall between the two chambers.

Box 4.11. The Marketing Association 'Umoja', connected to SATNET, and its FFLG had purchased an acre of land, where the storage room was built, and which was used as a demo garden for example to test different bean varieties, as a group. They tried a few types of beans, based on local seeds and seeds supplied by National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS). They had local Irish seed potatoes and cotton. Right now, they interacted with Integrated Seed Sector Development (ISSD) on making trials and selecting local seeds.

farmers rearing animals, this could be a beneficial new initiative, as long as the biogas plant was kept on a manageable level at which it could function sustainably.

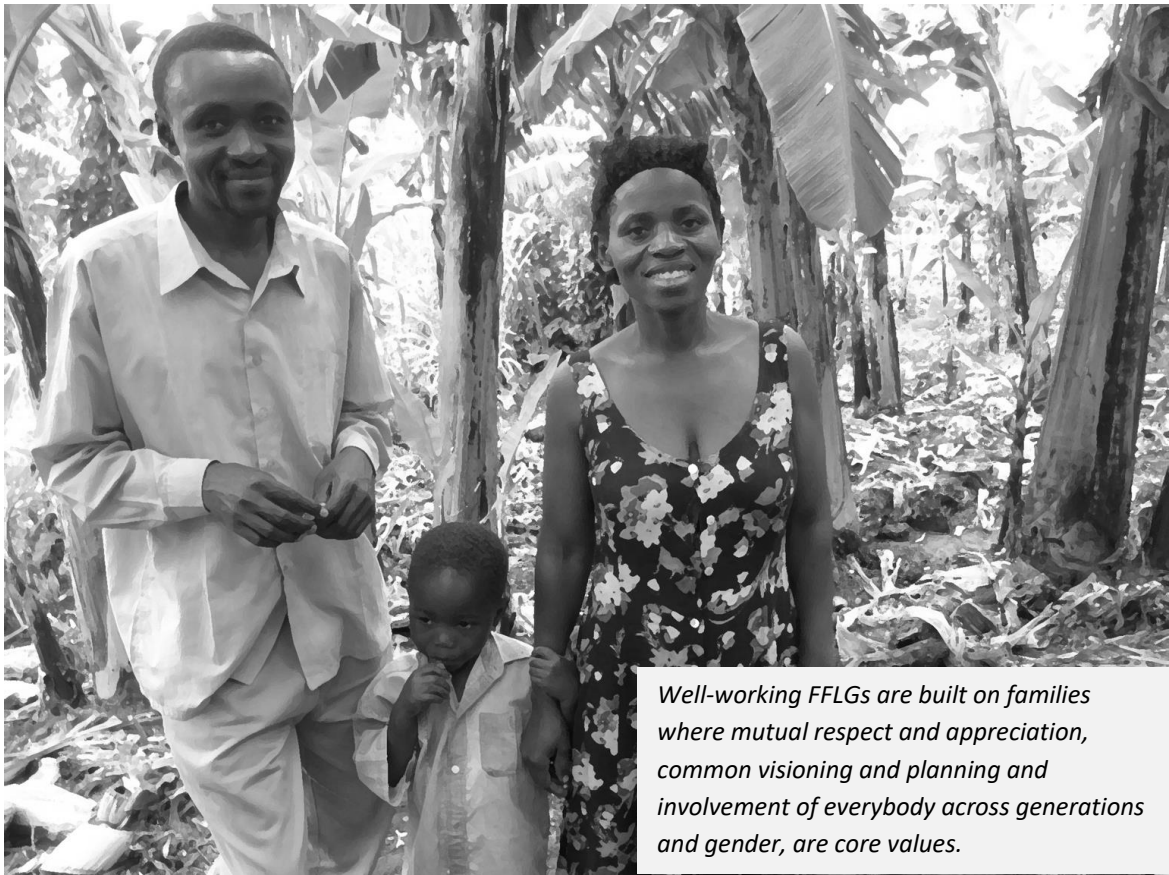
Networking to bring new knowledge into groups

In the first phases of establishing new FFLGs, farmers were guaranteed at least three visits from the external facilitators every month. During these visits a broad range of issues were jointly discussed and possible solutions identified. But as earlier explained, internal facilitators – who were group members – gradually took over, and needed to search and work for finding sources of knowledge, which the group could learn from or ask if the group members got stuck in a topic. For this reason, networking between groups were established by some organisations, such as the very well-organized network in Sulma Foods Ltd. (see chapter 6). Other organisations helped internal group facilitators to find target directed information because they knew other groups, which had found solutions to the same type of problems. Another way of networking and acquiring knowledge at a wider scale was to make sure that group members and facilitators from different FFLGs could be invited to fairs and tradeshows, to have new inspiration and expand their networking, as described in Box 4.12.

Box 4.12. In the organisation URDT, a number of the external as well as internal facilitators had participated in different agricultural and trade shows, and the organisation and network of facilitators made an effort to spread the information and find ways of easy transport so that especially remote group representatives could come and participate and get inspired. According to the facilitators, this had given much inspiration and opened their eyes to many things. One of the recent focus areas had been different systems and pumps for irrigation for a while. This was a major need because of the drought recently experienced. It gave relevant information to consider, also when they -could not afford it immediately.

Learning visits were conducted even outside the country to share knowledge and get inspiration from farmers with related aims, as shown in the example in Box 4.13. Facilitators from eight SATNET member organisations went on this learning visit.

Box 4.13 gives an example of the participation of the facilitator of the Karangura Twekambe FFLG in an exposure and learning visit in 2017 to Nairobi, Kenya. He had heard of coffee stumping, but had always been afraid of implementing it, until he got practical experience from Kenya. This gave him the courage to try it at home. He realised the benefits of maintaining their coffee fields at manageable short heights. The farmers were reluctant to implement a practice if the facilitator or others shared the knowledge without experience. In 2018, three farmers started to stump their coffee, allowing the rest of the group members to learn from them how the coffee plantations will function.



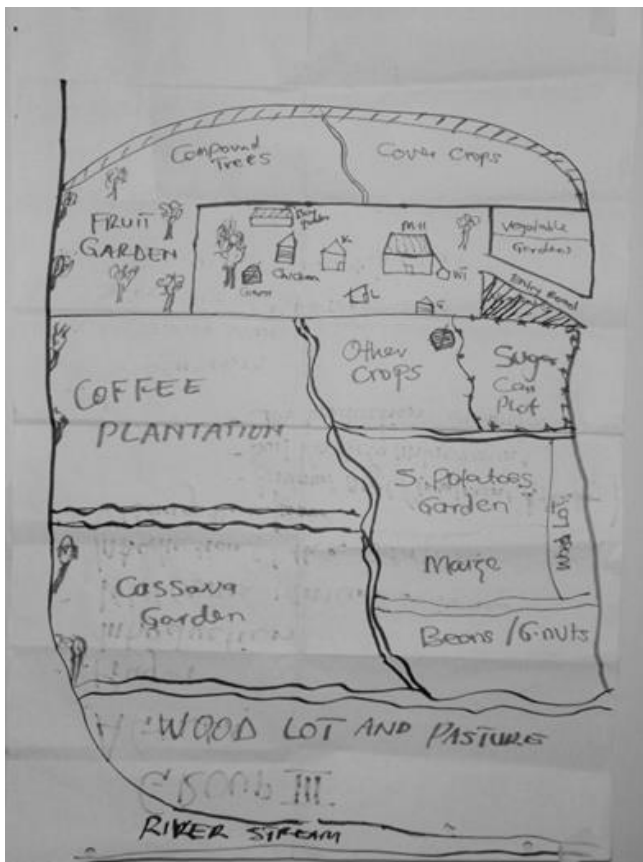
5. EMPHASIS ON THE FAMILY AND INVOLVEMENT OF ENTIRE HOUSEHOLDS

At a very early stage of establishing the first project, the involved organisations emphasized the importance of involving all members in a household in the farmer groups. They based this on multiple experiences of either ‘women’s groups’, which had not reached the effects which they had hoped for, because no changes were seen in structures and dynamics in the households. What did it help that the women became empowered and aware, when she in practice had not much say in the household, and when the husband may have felt threatened by her ‘being empowered’? A change at household level required change in and driven by all members in the household, in a process. They also referred to experiences with Farmer Field Schools, where they had seen that much of the knowledge discussed in the groups, were never brought into practice or debated at home, when the ‘farmer’ (often the husband who was also called the ‘head of the household’) participated. We concluded that every change needs an effort from a whole household, and therefore the whole household somehow has to be involved in the process of creating change. We decided along the way to include the term ‘farmer family’ in the name of the approach, and to understand it broadly as

‘household’, but also indicating that members of the groups ‘become family’.

Mutual respect and joint decision making starts with talking about things at household level

Already during the first experiences using the FFLG approach in the organisations connected to SATNET, we observed that it gradually became ‘normal’ in many families to talk about farming practices, food habits and issues related to food security and food choices. In many households, this had not been on the agenda as a ‘family



Box 5.1. A drawing of the farm (e.g. following ‘AESA guidelines’) helped many families to visualize their farms and talk about priorities and plans for the future. Many households kept the drawing somewhere in the home on a wall, where they could often see it. It also had the potential to involve the children, for example in the discussion of future land use. In many FFLGs, the drawings were also used to discuss and give good advice.

discussion’ before. Also, potential future investments became ‘something which was talked about in the families’, and this talk could guide priorities and crucial decisions about how to divide land for family food and for cash crops. The mutual respect for each other grew within the families, and they developed common priorities and focus. The sharing of experience became bridges between what previously seemed to have been divided in a sphere of either men or women. It showed in a very vivid way how women were empowered through empowerment of the whole family, e.g. women taking leadership roles in FFLGs and freely contributing ideas during meetings, as opposed to earlier. Husbands appreciated this, and started seeing this as a benefit rather than a threat to his authority in the household. It all seemed to start at household levels by making it ‘normal’ and legitimate to talk about and discuss things and issues, which formerly were not brought into discussions between

husbands and wives, and between generations. In Box 5.1, the farm plan gives an

example of a very practical and concrete ‘product’ of working together at household levels, and in many households, they showed it to and discussed it with the FFLG. Another example, which some families mentioned, was the ‘cash book’. When they kept records at household level of the money which went in and out of the household. It made the money flow visible for every member in the household, which gave a good basis for discussing.

Box 5.2 gives some examples of the impact of being a member of a FFLG on the daily life in the families. These are four of 17 small stories told at a group meeting in a focus group interview. All quotes were written as they were translated to English:

I have been in this organisation 8 years now. I had experienced a lot of domestic violence between me and my husband. He became a member. Before we were poor – very poor – now I know how to grow food. I am trying to make my savings. I have learnt a lot, and my husband have learnt a lot. The group helped to create peace in our home, they came in and helped.

I was living in another world. Eating greens was none of my business. Now I can produce vegetables. I grow these small organic tomatoes and we eat them. I did not educate the older children, because of poverty. But the young children are now being educated, after we became members of the group.

The unity of the group is the greatest benefit. There was conflict between me and my husband as always, and that is not anymore. I am able to educate my children. I appreciate the effort of my group. In the time where I was taking care of my father, they helped: they took care of the garden and compound and stood there even in the painful moments. Now I am building a house and have livestock, and grow bananas.

I have learnt good agronomic practices. And when I gave birth to my child [she was sitting with her baby in her arms], it was almost going wrong, but the group had 350.000 Ush that I could get to go to the hospital, and I gave birth to my child there.

In some cases, it also brought the generations together, because the young generation often had the skills to keep records, which in return gave them an insight into matters which previously were ‘none of their business’.

As can be seen from the examples in Box 5.2, the involvement of whole households, ‘families’, in the farmer groups, had tremendous effects on the ways in which life was lived in the households. The empowerment of women and the end of gender related suppression and violence are the cornerstones for future development, and the take-

home message from the learning about how FFLGs work, became ‘Empowerment of women happens best through empowerment of entire households’. In the example in Box 5.3, a quite destructive development in a household was settled with the help of the FFLG and hopefully resolved on a long term basis, but the example may show why the mutual respect and appreciation between husband and wife is such an important quality for development. In the previous booklet (‘The Rwenzori Experience’) we gave examples of FFLGs which had helped women to stay on the land after having lost their husbands – another major issue in many Ugandan settings, where women still had no formal land rights or inheritance rights.

Box 5.3 gives an example from the organisation URDT, where a wife in one of the FFLGs had been the primary driver in the family to set up a very good and beautiful diversified garden, with the help of the group – she was the one working mostly with the group. Her husband decided to marry a new wife and then the old wife should move. She protested, and there was a lot of fuzz about it; the husband went to the Local Council (LC), and quite some people around him was at his side. Then the group mobilized and made a lot of noise, and went together and went to the LC. Finally, the man gave up his other marriage, and they went together again.

The family- and household approach brought a wider holistic view on food security. In the projects, we had (maybe naively) started out with a main focus on agriculture and agronomic practices to improve food availability. But – the approach led to a focus on much broader issues, such as domestic violence, shared responsibilities in households for resources and finances, hygiene and sanitation, as well as participation in wider community and society development. As illustrated in the examples in this booklet, the holistic way in which knowledge was shared and problems were discussed in and addressed by the FFLGs, led to many changes in household practices, which in various ways also were related to food security. The household incomes generally improved, in some cases quite dramatically. This was not only because of the joint effort for improved production and diversification of food and cash crops, but also because of the shared control over and decisions regarding finances and farm resources.

Preparing the young generation for times of change

The approach of involving entire households also included children and young people. This had the effect that many young people became increasingly interested in farming,

and became more skilled and more involved in the activities and decisions on the farm. In many of the families, important decisions were taken jointly and responsibilities were shared within the family.

Uganda is like most of the world increasingly affected by climate change consequences, as well as – to various degree - population pressures and rapid or gradual changes in societal structures, migration patterns or involvement in land user-right disputes. One of the most challenging change connecting to this development is that the lives of the current generation is very different from that of former generations and the lives of future generations will be even more different. This means that the younger generation cannot make their way simply by learning from the former generation, but they have to learn along the way, and then common situated learning becomes even more important and instrumental to making the way forward and find new solutions to emerging problems and challenges. The dialogues and common intergenerational learning becomes paramount for this development.

Box 5.4 gives an example of how the SATNET-member-organisation, Umoja, had encouraged a special youth group to be formed as a part of their activities. It was led by two young leaders with agricultural skills and education, and the participants were among others young mothers, some students and others. They participated generally in the group activities, and they made the bricks for the storage room, which now was finished up to ring-beam. They had also invested in poultry to motivate the youth to work with that, and they had lobbied Kiima Foods for ½ acre of land for growing Irish potatoes; Kiima Foods is a local organisation which has some land and is linking up with local schools.

During the projects in the member organisations of SATNET, we saw much evidence of this happening in various ways and to various degree. Not only did it push and stimulate young people to re-consider the possibilities to work and hope for a viable and promising future in the rural areas, but it also enabled them to find tools to meet the increasing challenges in a better degree than what they had been able to before they joined a FFLG. Some FFLGs took up family-members as independent members from an age of 15 years, and in some cases, they were involved in the farming at home, or helping as paid workers in peak periods in the community. In the example in Box 3.15, children always helped in the community garden of the FFLG Kia Kysa Maria, which also helped young people to improve their understanding of using their farmer skills to participate in the marketing of produce, and in the example in Box 3.13, young people found several innovative ways of making incomes and organize

themselves. The group, which was presented in Box 3.8, Nyakabingo Farmers Association, had organized that young men finishing school had trainings on simple tools, carpentry and other handcrafts, and made bricks and they had invested in a few sewing machines that some of the young mothers in the group could work with. As the example in Box 5.4 shows, some groups supported the establishment of special ‘youth groups’, which had its own leadership and where the members had a diversity of activities.

The family as institution to become drivers of local development

Inviting fellow-farmers into your home creates – as also emphasized elsewhere – mutual understanding and respect, in addition to the situated common learning. Not only that: it also had impact on each individual household and its internal dynamics, because all its members involved themselves in ‘the joint project of inviting others into the farm and the compound’, which strengthened the bonds and the feeling of togetherness within the household. We saw how local communities became stronger, when families started working together and using their resources in a group of both men and women, elders and youth. The families are strong institutions, and only the collaboration between the family members – the household members – can ensure that they can work and raise voices when needed. Social capital is not only about trust, collaboration and networking, but it is paramount to initiate and create processes of lasting change and advocate for better conditions and fairness. Concrete examples where fairness was endangered could be the right to stay on the land, which was farmed in the families for generations, or better control over seed and food, access to infrastructure, clean water and health systems. Strengthening households to stand and work together to strengthen the local communities, the local development and the institutions, gave us the last important argument to focus on entire households and families.



Direct contact and constant exchange between different actors related to food production is important - producers, buyers, consumers, citizens, politicians, authorities

6. MARKETING PRODUCE TOGETHER

Introduction: opportunities and challenges of marketing produce

During the past ten years, Farmer Family Learning Groups have developed in many different ways, shaped by and developing with the context. The mutual commitment within the groups was strengthened through savings and credit schemes, established within the group of farmer families, or as part of a larger structure where more groups and individuals were members. This was often the first step to starting joint activities, which also involved some marketing activities: either producing crops together, for example at a common plot of land, or agreeing that every household would produce a certain crop or vegetable together (e.g. onions) which could be sold jointly to a better price, because of the larger quantity.

Already during the first discussions and developments of FFLGs, common marketing was discussed as one of the major potentials of joining forces as a group. The reason why was clear: improved bargaining power, because a farmer group was able to deliver a larger amount of produce and therefore to have more weight and go directly to the buyers, who wanted larger quantities. They could in other words jump over the so-called middlemen, who came to buy from individual farmers, who often

needed immediate money and was more or less under pressure to sell under the conditions of the buyer. In numerous cases they sold their produce for a low price to get money immediately, and in some cases before the produce was harvested. At a general level, everybody saw the possibilities to market jointly as a great benefit. In a project in SATNET and its member organisations, the focus was quite solely on forming so-called Marketing Associations, which in most cases consisted of more FFLGs. In this chapter, we show a spectrum of different forms of marketing produce together by forming Marketing Associations or relying on FFLGs as the backbone of a strong company, which wants to stay competitive on different markets.



Box 6.1. Many FFLGs had a strategy to sell their products together at the local market, e.g. onions, which the FFLG members have collected from their gardens and hung for drying in a common storage, but also matooke, vegetables or fruits. Some grew them with the intention to sell, and some sold from the surplus after having secured the family food security. In some cases, a FFLG grew cash crops at a common spot of land.

In the final evaluation of this project, it was concluded that increased income from higher volumes markets and better prices was the major benefit in almost all cases. The increased income was used mostly to the benefit of the households, e.g. education of children, construction of houses and purchase of items for the household. Several other benefits were also mentioned, most importantly related to the social capital building and interactions, friendship and trust between member families. In addition to this, improved skills were often mentioned as a major benefit. As unfolded in some of the examples, greater awareness of ‘what is good quality’ was another benefit, which strengthened the effort to produce high quality food products, and continuously improve the farming skills – for example pest management and soil quality – as well as post-harvest handling. The chapter will start with pointing to two of the main challenges, which many MAs had to overcome:

first, the members needed to improve their record keeping, which would enable them, among others, to keep track of their produce and participate as active and well-informed members of the Marketing Association. Secondly, a major challenge of almost all MAs was raising enough funds to for example value add, store or transport the produce. To overcome this challenge, a Trust fund was established as part of the project to help 20 MAs through these first challenges. This Trust fund is described in Box 6.2.

Establishment of a Marketing Association

Keeping records at farm and MA levels

The farmers mentioned the capacity to keep records as a great achievement when establishing a Marketing Association, because it enabled them to keep the overview over the actual production on the farm and in the group, and being able to budget and plan. However, many farmers had not learned to read and write, and had not seen the advantage of records, so record keeping remained a challenge. The family approach proved in many cases to have the benefit that the younger generations had acquired more knowledge and skills, so they became involved in the record and book-keeping. Based on numerous testimonies saying these things, we conclude that the increased income seemed to lead to a better livelihood for the families, and we see it in combination with statements that the households generally ate more nourishing food, because food diversity and utilization also became a focus and priority area for many households. The focus was in those cases double: there should be something to sell to have an income, but the household resilience generally increased by growing family food too.

In Nyamughasana Marketing Association (described in Box 6.7), the staff had tried to train farmers more broadly in record keeping at home, using quite simple methods, assisted by some of the members who were strong in record keeping. The staff emphasized that they kept records of every delivery, and they could tell the farmers how much he or she had produced within any given time-period, at any time. In that way, the farmers always could get information on their sales.

The potential role of a Trust fund in developing small businesses

One significant principle of the FFLGs was that every group should take the starting point in their own context and reality, and base all their activities on their own

existing and available resources. However, when entering into small businesses, the project organisations had seen a need for raising funds beyond what most FFLGs realistically could raise. This was the reason why a so-called Trust fund was established in the SATNET.

Box 6.2 about the Trust fund for business development in the Rwenzori area, established in 2014. The aim of this Trust fund was to support business development of 20 Market Associations (MAs), which were part of the so-called SATNET-3-project. Three persons from the SATNET board were selected as board members for the Trust fund and one from SATNET, Centenary Bank and OD was assign as technical assistant to the Trust fund board. A total amount of 400.000 DDK was allocated from the project, of which 25% was allocated to the initial phase of developing business plans for the FFLGs, which could document that they had capacity to join or establish a Marketing Association, for example through record keeping or consistent activities producing and handling produce for sale, or already established Marketing Associations. Their 5-year-business plans were used as applications for further funds and should contain the following information:

1. Description of the production which they planned to market
2. An estimate of their production capacity for this product (5 years ahead)
3. Their planned accounting system on farm and business levels
4. A financing plan
5. An outline of the contracts which they planned to sign with farmers and between FFLGs (the latter only in cases where more FFLGs form a Marketing Association).

Based on these applications, 20 MAs were selected for further support through the project, and they could apply for funds for investments like equipment, machinery, store etc. The support fund never reached more than 50% of the planned investment, which means that every MA, which qualified for getting funds from the Trust fund, had to raise funds from elsewhere or use own savings, or transfer their own labor to co-finance to match the funds from the Trust fund. The Trust fund team assisted the MAs in finding further support/loan from banks, funds etc., and in some cases in terms of labour hours form construction work or brick making. The money from the Trust fund was used for stores, motorbike, tricycles, milling and hulling machines.

The Marketing Associations were based on FFLGS, and in most cases, they had difficulties as newly established Marketing Associations to get loans from the local Bank or Sacco ('Small Saving & Credit Cooperative Organisation', which is normally owned, governed and managed by its members who share bonds to e.g. church, labour union, or a community).

The design of the Trust fund was transparent, and it was open to every applicant who got support, and why they got this support. The success of this Trust fund could probably also be explained by the fact that 25% of the total fund from the start was allocated to finance help and consultancies for the development of the business plans. Many of the FFLGs or MAs under establishment had no experience with business plans or setting up structures and accounting systems, and a major effort was necessary regarding development of a clear implementable business plan.

Different organisational and marketing strategies

Ensuring enough quantity to be in a good bargaining position

Majority of the MAs had difficulties in realizing significant volumes for joint selling, for different reasons.

Box 6.3 is a story about Kasegerenthe MA, where the members had limited land access and therefore started renting land to cultivate together, and in this way improving their position on the market. The group was established in 1998 by 15 farmer families with the aim of participating in nature conservations and the promotion of natural resources in Uganda. Later the group turned into a FFLG with focus on vegetables sold in the local market, sometimes as individuals and other times sold jointly as a group. In 2015, the group had grown and 90 members were working in 3 FFLGs, all being part of a Savings & Credit scheme, and they had especially focused on mobilising more young members.

They formulated a joint project as a Marketing Association, with an overall aim: ‘to *improve livelihood* among the groundnut farmers in Kasese district’. Under this aim, they focused on four goals: 1) train members in good agronomic practices of both groundnuts and beans, 2) establish a farmer’ bank, 3) encourage members for collective marketing, and 4) lobby and advocate for the cooperative.

The MA was organised with a board, sales, supervision, and monitoring committees, and the MA rented 20 acres to grow G-nuts on, although that piece of land was a bit far from their homesteads. They rented a plot and constructed a house for the coffee and G-nuts huller. The hulling machine was installed with financial support from the Trust fund and the investment from the MA members. They had two staff members employed. They sold G-nuts and coffee together, but greens & vegetables were sold individually or by smaller groups on the local market, which made it more flexible as a more immediate income source. They used Participatory Monitoring to support the planning at weekly meetings in MA, and when making the yearly plan for the MA. 70% of the members kept records of production, quality

and income on their farms, and used the information to improve planning of their farm production.

In 2017, drought spoiled their G-nuts in the last season and they did not harvest anything at all. At the time where the research for this booklet was ended, they had started growing more coffee with the target to increase the amount of coffee which they could market together, and thereby diversify their income possibilities, and they were still searching for more options to secure a more diversified income.

One reason was that their production on farms was not high enough, and the farmers needed to improve their practices and build up more capacity. This was a major reason for emphasizing the membership of FFLGs as a precondition for joining a MA: the members continuously learned from and stimulated each other.

Box 6.4 tells about Musomba MA, established in 2015 with 26 members, with the goal of reaching 60 members by 2019. They were inspired by the vision of being '*A society with high standards of living*', and the mission: '*Improving the member's livelihood through organic agriculture and collective marketing*'. This led to the objectives: '*To improve household income, increased maize production and organized market access*'. This MA set out to achieve its goals but realised that they had a weak position at the market because of the small quantities which they could produce, and they had limited land access. They made a business plan, which envisioned that they could at least triple their production if they rented land as a MA, and started growing maize together. They rented 20 acres of land, and through support from the Trust fund, they were able to buy a small tractor for ploughing and transporting the maize. By following this strategy, they improved their bargaining power significantly, and indeed, the following years, despite challenges such as stable 3-phase-power connection and fluctuating prices, their net income increased between double and triple. After this, they started searching for options to diversify their production, so that they were not solely dependent on maize production. In 2019, they reached a membership number of 110, so by far they surpassed their target.

Other reasons were that some members occasionally sold a proportion of their produce individually to middlemen / traders, especially when they were in urgent need of money to cater for pressing demands such as medical treatment, school fees and other home necessities. In some cases, a MA had difficulties in getting a strong position when bargaining, because the group of farmers was relatively small, and they could simply not produce big quantities. As told in Box 6.3, the MA

Kasegerenthe took the step to rent land to produce quantities and thereby market them to a better price. Unfortunately, they experienced drought, and this led them to seek options to diversify. In the story about Musomba in Box 6.4, they chose the strategy to be able to producing a higher quantity. Indeed, they improved their bargaining position on the maize market, and increase their incomes significantly, but remained with the challenge of lacking 3-phase-power.

Improving quality

There are many aspects of quality of agricultural products, and it was a major learning and effort for many MAs to enter the market and produce crops of a suitable quality for the markets that they targeted.

Box 6.5 is about the MA 'Thukolethuthi Kabingo', which had a common focus on marketing of coffee. They brought their coffee from individual farms to a common drying and storage place, and organized somebody to manage the drying process. In this way, they obtained a good quality. In 8 years, they had expanded from 30 households to 150 households in the MA. This group had a strong common goal, and their application for the Trust fund was not approved in the first instance. Their name "Thukolethuthi" literally translated means "having been faced with this situation, now what shall we do to proceed?" So, they continued, and started building shelters for their coffee from their own available resources. This enabled them to start selling their coffee to Bukonzo Organic (BOCU). When Bukonzo Organic heard of the good practices and progress of Thukolethuthi Kabingo, they assigned external inspectors to assess if Thukolethuthi Kabingo qualified as organic coffee producers. Following the already internal organic standards/ practices, BOCU found out that Thukolethuthi Kabingo qualified to sell organic coffee. Bukonzo Organic is a cooperative union, which currently works with 36 FFLGs of which each FFLG operate a coffee micro washing station. Thukolethuthi Kabingo currently operates two of those micro washing stations. BOCU exported organic coffee to Europe and to the United States of America. Thukolethuthi Kabingo got a very good store, supported by the Trust fund on the second application.

Dimensions of quality was e.g. whether they had a certification (e.g. organic versus conventional), where farmers and MAs needed to meet certain criteria and had to undergo inspections at crop and farm levels. When selling the produce, basic things have to be checked, such as cleanliness of the produce (that there are no stones or any other types of pollution), and depending on type of product, that they are not damaged, have rotten spots or overripe – as well as they are sufficiently ripe - and can be kept for an expected time-period. Another dimension of quality is e.g.

appearance, smell, taste and other sensoric qualities, which can be connected to the mode of production, but also on the processing of the raw products. Many MAs had a quality control committee with a small number of members, who had received special training in different quality traits, such as Nyakabingo (Box 6.6) and Nyamughasana (Box 6.7).

Box 6.6 Nyakabingo Farmers United, a Marketing Association under SATNET, was an cooperative with 560 members from 140 households, and 20 FFLGs. Charles, who was the external facilitator in the area, had educated two other external facilitators. We visited the cooperative, and one of the FFLGs, called Kyaminyoky, which had existed for 7 years as a S&C group, but only for 4 years as a FFLG.

They had formulated a vision as a Marketing Association: *'A leading farmer organisation focused on integrated Conservation Marketing and development'*, as well as a mission, also reflecting the focus on members' livelihoods improvements, and aims, for example the following: *'To promote environmental protection in close cooperation with all stakeholders'*, and *'To promote gender equality among our members through farmer field groups (FFLG) and Gender Action learning system (GALS)'*. All these goals, aims and visions were exposed on the wall, and so was the lists of FFLGs, committees (business, finance, and disciplinary committees, contact farmers for the different FFLGs as well as groups, their management structures. They emphasized transparency and openness, and that they were very eager to learn, as a young business. They also were very well aware of the greater sustainability, if they could manage to get a viable business up and running: *'With a lot of aid we may not succeed, but with business we may succeed'*.

They benefitted from being members of the association, in addition to being members of FFLGs, by a better price from bulking, and they got new knowledge and training from the MA. One of the challenges, though, was that they did not get their money before after 2 weeks, so they needed to have a 'buffer' in term of finances. To a certain extend they could use their saving and credit system for urgent needs. They were generally challenged by fluctuating prices, and especially by buyers not being interested in good quality coffee: they mixed it all, and that was the challenge for the group: *'Big buyers come in – and we are not in the position to negotiate. They just say 'please bring whatever you have', and then they just mix and don't give premium prices for good quality'*. They realized that their way forward might be to find buyers who would go for good quality, and that they could think of further value addition like roasting, and maybe look into the expanding local market.

The cooperation processed both organic and non-organic coffee: the organic coffee was only received as red berries, and which they sold to Bukonzo Organic. The non-organic coffee was

dried when they received it. They bought coffee from about 100 members, and were open to all who would follow their aims and buy shares and pay membership fee. They emphasized that non-members got the same price for their coffee, as members, but only members got the premium price. Some sold to other buyers if they urgently needed money, and others bought from fellow-farmers and sold to the association.

In box 6.9, the story about Kaghema Agheterane Cooperative Society Ltd. is told: they went for the production of high-quality cocoa, and managed to join forces with other marketing cooperatives and get into the international markets. The example in Box 6.5 tells the story of Thukolethuthi Kabingo, which developed from a group of 30 households to 150 households, and which by joining a larger cooperative, got a strong focus on quality which enabled them to export organic coffee to larger markets, after having processed it through the first steps at well-established micro washing stations. One of the challenges constantly facing the farmers, who tried to improve quality and get a better price for their produce, was that buyers did not recognize or distinguish between the different qualities. In this way, the members of some MAs felt that their emphasis on good quality was ‘wasted’, because they saw buyers just mix all qualities. They identified a great potential to improve the income and position if they find buyers who go for quality, and they – of course – were able to produce a sufficient quantity of high quality produce.

Diversifying to build resilience

Many families in the FFLGs produced more varied food and food in larger quantities. Selling surplus of own food production on the local markets was an immediately and viable income generation strategy, and it was quite easily adopted by a lot of families and groups. As the example in Box 6.3 tells, the MA members sold g-nuts and coffee together, but every households or smaller groups of member households sold their own surplus or production of vegetables, and in this way got more flexibility, and in this case resilience on household level. Most often, there was a market in the nearby area, where it was possible to sell e.g. onions, matooke, tomatoes or other food crops and eggs. In other cases, FFLGs joined forces and marketed their vegetables together, or added value to it, e.g. produce cassava flour



or mill the maize. This strategy allowed them to secure their own family food, and yet they could sell potential surplus. One group, Umoja, found a business opportunity by combining their diverse productions, and sold collections of vegetables and meat for parties in neighbor

villages. The wives were often in control of this type of income, because it was ‘normal food grown on the farm’, and they often invested in children’s education and the agriculture. Selling at the local market were more stable, yet gave a bigger flexibility than aiming at export markets.

Many Marketing Associations saw the benefit of diversifying their range of products. This was the case for Kanyamura Twekambe MA, which worked with diversified cash crops for different markets as a strategy to become less vulnerable to fluctuating prices and failed harvests as described in Box 3.11. This was also the strategy of Kasegerenthe (Box 6.3) and Musomba (Bo 6.4): they saw how vulnerable their position could be with only one major crop, and sought possibilities for diversifying their productions.

Many MAs connected to the project, developed diversified productions. It could be a strategy of the company – like the example in Box 6.6, telling about how Nyakabingo Farmers United marketed a range of different qualities of coffee, and sold both organic and non-organic coffee. In many cases, diversification was at farm as well as MA level, in terms of production of different crops. This increased the requirements to everybody: the farmer, who had to produce high-quality products of different types, and the MAs, which had to keep themselves updated on different markets and trends among customers. They also had to learn about quality traits of a variety of products, including new methodologies and techniques to improve quality and process the different products. The case of Nitwe Bucuni Farmers MA

in Box 6.8 tells about a double focus on coffee and maize – where the group could use the same machinery for processing these two crops, and at the same time having a focus on bean production and potentially other crops. Box 6.7 describes how Nyamughasana Valley Farmers Cooperative expanded as association as well as in range of products, gradually improving the skills to produce different bee-product, including propolis in addition to honey and wax.

Finding a suitable strategy in a competitive market environment

A strong competition was observed on the markets, which the MAs in this project tried to enter, even when focusing on high quality. Some markets were under control by few big companies which managed well and even



pushed an environment of price fluctuations, in contrast to the MAs. Many examples given in this chapter shows how a range of very diverse MAs were able to identify and follow certain strategies, which in the given contexts were suitable and meaningful for them. In this project, many MAs started literally from scratch, and the possibility for support from the Trust fund proved to be decisive for enabling the MAs to establish themselves, e.g. giving the opportunity regarding storage rooms, processing facilities, transport options or training. As the examples in Boxes 6.3 and 6.4 also showed, some groups realized that they had to invest in land to being able to produce sufficient volumes, because they were just ‘too small players’ in the environment.

One major challenge, which required that both farmers and MAs were flexible and economically resilient, was the timing of payment in these competitive markets with strong price fluctuations. Nyakabingo Farmers United (Box 6.6) was for example

often only able to pay the farmers some weeks after they had delivered their produce, and they could - to some extent - compensate through their S&C system for urgent needs.

Box 6.7 Nyamughasana Valley Farmers Cooperative Society started in 2000 as group of farmers with the aim of poverty reduction among the rural active poor in Bukonzo East, Kasese District. They all worked with bee keeping, and the first farmer group of 16 members sold 56 kg of honey. In 2004, the group was trained on bee keeping practices by an organisation working with apiculture, and acquired 50 bee hives after the training. In the same year, they were trained by SATNET on joint marketing efforts, and started also selling coffee together. In 2008, they started a S&C scheme, and in 2011 they had expanded to 10 FFLGs. They saw the benefits of farmer households being organised into FFLGs, which made the number of and connection to members strong. Not all members of the MA were members of a FFLG. FFLG-members sold more consistently to the MA, whereas other members sometimes had a stronger tendency to sell to middle-men and other buyers. They also started producing castor oil. One FFLG took care of the postharvest handling. The MA gradually got facilities, e.g. store and office, and some land, among others for a future shop. The number of members grew steadily to over 500. In 2018, they sold honey, coffee, castor oil – which they could process at the store and sell directly to a local manufacturers - and beeswax. They had four employees: a manager and finance controller (both women), and marketing person and security personnel. The MA constantly took initiatives to improve life of the member families, e.g. in 2018, they planned for multiplying Mucuna beans for all farmers. They also aimed at tree planting in coffee plantations to fight climate change, and they encouraged efforts for food security, tree planting and trench digging at FFLG level. They also had several challenges. Being a young company with a growing number of farmers, they experienced that productivity and quality of the products could be very low, and the MA sometimes rejected products because of low quality.

The MA staff members kept precise records of all buyings and sellings during the period, where the Association had been working. They did the quality checking of all products, and the Association generally accepted good quality coffee, and always rejected bad quality. Although the MA would like the farmers to keep good records of their products as a planning tool, many farmers did not yet manage to do so. They had introduced Participatory Monitoring in the FFLGs. The farmers told that they benefitted greatly from bulking their produce, because they got a better price. However, the price fluctuation at the market was still enormous, and the Marketing Association often had challenges. Sometimes they had bought from the producers for an agreed price, and by the time the

buyer was there, the prices had already dropped. At other times, the buyer called and announced that they could buy for a good price, if they could mobilise a certain amount before midnight. After midnight the prices would drop. The huge challenge of collecting the necessary amount and quality in time, and get it delivered created many stressful situations for Marketing Associations in general, and required action and strong networks.

Nyamughasana Valley Farmers Cooperative Society (in Box 6.7) agreed on certain prices with the farmers, but they experienced sometimes that already by the time they sold the produce, the prices had dropped. Strategies were necessary to navigate under these conditions, and the diversification and possibility of the associations to have some working capital and being able to store products until prices improved, were emphasized as important. The farmers – including the staff and appointed leaders of the MAs – were very aware of this, and included it in some cases as part of their strategy, such as e.g. Nitwe Bucuni Farmers MA, which among their four declared objectives had ‘To advocate for the rights of the local farmers on the price decision making’. Some MAs also emphasized this, among others through emphasizing the farmer ownership, such as expressed in the vision of Kaghema Agheterane Cooperative Society (Box 6.9): ‘A leading farmer owned provider of high quality certified organic cocoa beans and services in Bundibudyo District by the year 2021’. As appears as obvious from the example in Box 6.7, Nyamughasana Valley Farmers Cooperative Society developed over a relatively short time span to becoming a professionally managed business with processing of several products, a range of sales points, and quality control. However, not only that – but also very hard work and an effort to meet demands of a tough and competitive market which often showed to exist on the premises of the buyer, who set up requirements of volume, quality and short deadlines. Hard working and well-organised staff-members and flexible farmers – who were able to deliver at short notice – made it possible to manage these challenges.

MAs as important actors in community development

The Marketing Associations were established as businesses, with the purposes of providing the members with better income and lead to better livelihoods. The participation in FFLGs often contributed with a continued focus on social capital and development of human skills and knowledge. However, in some cases, the Marketing Associations also took this role and emphasized aspects of community development at different levels: 1) the smaller community of members, or 2) the

wider community, such as the village – where the MA worked on advocacy issues, or by planting trees and engaging in road construction to the benefit of everybody in the area.

The focus for many MAs as expressed in their visions and missions, was far from solely development of the business itself, although involving various aspects of businesses, profit, and quantities of products as well. In other words, many visions of the MAs addressed lively-



hoods and futures of the members and communities. Nyakabingo Farmers United (Box 6.6) integrated in their aims ‘*To promote environmental protection in close cooperation with all stakeholders*’ and ‘*To promote gender equality among our members through farmer field groups (FFLGs) and Gender Action learning systems (GALS)*’, which could all be read on the wall of their office. Likewise, the choice of articulated core values also reflected a high ethical standard and emphasis within the MAs, such as Kaghema Agheterane Cooperative Society Ltd., which emphasized the following core values: ‘*Integrity, Honesty, Team Work, Mutual Respect, and Transparency*’.

In various ways, this contributed to their role in local communities to give good examples. Nitwe Bucuni Farmers Ltd. (Box 6.8) had the vision ‘*A well informed population, socially empowered and economically active*’ and the mission ‘*to empower the rural community for group marketing as well as value addition*’. This primarily targeted their members and producers, but nevertheless, it also expressed that they actually envisioned a wider inclusion of community members as part of their MA. Through their articulated focus on meeting climate change challenges, they also showed a focus of being able to lead and give good examples for future ways of combatting common challenges.

Marketing as a strategy for young farmers to become viable

The FFLG approach has at all times emphasized the inclusion of all generations – including the children and young people on the farm – to lead the way for sustainable futures also for the coming generations.

Box 6.8 tells about the Nitwe Bucuni Farmers MA, which started as a FFLG of 30 members, originated from the Kirongo Youth Drama Group and consisted exclusively of young farmers. As a FFLG, they experienced that their agronomic practices improved after having worked and learned together, and they developed a S&C scheme, which remained within the FFLGs, also after they turned into a MA in 2013. These farmers had relatively big farms, improved crop rotation, and the MA had additional focus on: 1) timely planting/ sowing to increase production and reduce harvest loss due to drought, 2) construction of granaries for storing millet, 3) treatment of crop diseases with organic methods, 4) use of Tithonia for liquid manure, 5) water/soil conservation practices like mulching, terracing, composting and agroforestry. The groups had successfully applied for a good variety of sweet potatoes from the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS). They transformed into a MA with 13 women and 17 men, and joint marketing of coffee. They also started agroforestry trees (calliandra and grevillia and others) and grow animal feed. In 2016, they had expanded to 3 FFLGs, and was registered as a Community Based Organisation (CBO). Their vision was ‘A well informed population, socially empowered and economically active’, and their mission was ‘To empower the rural community for group marketing as well as value addition’. They had formulated the following 4 objectives:

1. To mobilize and sensitize the community to engage in coffee production and marketing.
2. To improve the standards of living of members through increased income generation.
3. To promote the awareness of farmers on the crop value addition and associated benefits.
4. To advocate for the rights of the local farmers on the price decision making.

They gradually expanded from only coffee to maize and beans, and aimed at improving the quantity, quality as well as processing the crops to get a better bargaining power and profit. They also had a policy of selling produce at lower prices to other community members. Coffee diseases remained a problem throughout the years, and some years (e.g. 2016), they struggled with low harvests because of drought. At this point, they also started focusing on how to meet climate change challenges and improve their food security. They were supported in their business plans, and shared some land and material to make a coffee nursery. They got Trust fund support and bought a multipurpose coffee and maize huller / miller, and built a structure for the processing of coffee and maize, aiming at also building a store. To overcome constraints like transport and poor road conditions, they started to make advocacy towards assistance from authorities for better roads.

Their focus on quality became stronger, and they had capacity to bulk and wait to sell their produce until prices were good, and the MA-members got their payment immediately after the produce was sold

Participatory Monitoring was introduced to all members in 2017, and they all developed records for their production on farm level. They used a peer system from the MA to support farmers, and most of them have a simple family records. As a start each farmer gives reports to MA on disease in crops and expected yield.

Many MAs had included this focus in their strategies, and some of them encouraged young members of the households to become members of the MAs from a young age, e.g. 15 years. Even though the young people may not have control or access to land, they sometimes could be allowed to take responsibility for plots on their parents' farm, or they could participate and contribute as labourers, or do tasks such as compost making, production of seedlings, or bee-keeping. Both FFLGs and some MAs had a special 'youth group' or 'youth club' (e.g. Box 5.4). The example in Box 6.8 tells about a MA, where all the farmers were young farmers, who started their activities with agroforestry, but gradually developed into a strong group and MA, which had focus on more crops, as well as environmental care and social cohesion.

When Farmer Family Learning Groups become a company approach

Co-authored by Bogere Godfrey, Sulma Foods Ltd.

Sulma Foods Ltd. is a company marketing dried and fresh fruit for export, e.g. to Japan and Europe. The company is situated close to Luwero, a couple of hrs. drive from Kampala, and started with 50 farmers in 2001. By the time, we initiated our work on this booklet, they were about 900 households, and the company had expanded considerably over the last few years. These 900 farmers were organized in 46 FFLGs, and these FFLGs were organized in six smaller networks, each with internal facilitator. Two or three external facilitators were connected to one network, and mentored the internal facilitators, as illustrated in Figure 6.1. This network structure ensured an efficient communication between farmers and company, and it enables a possibility to meet, inspire each other, exchange experience, and work in local networks with minimal transport.

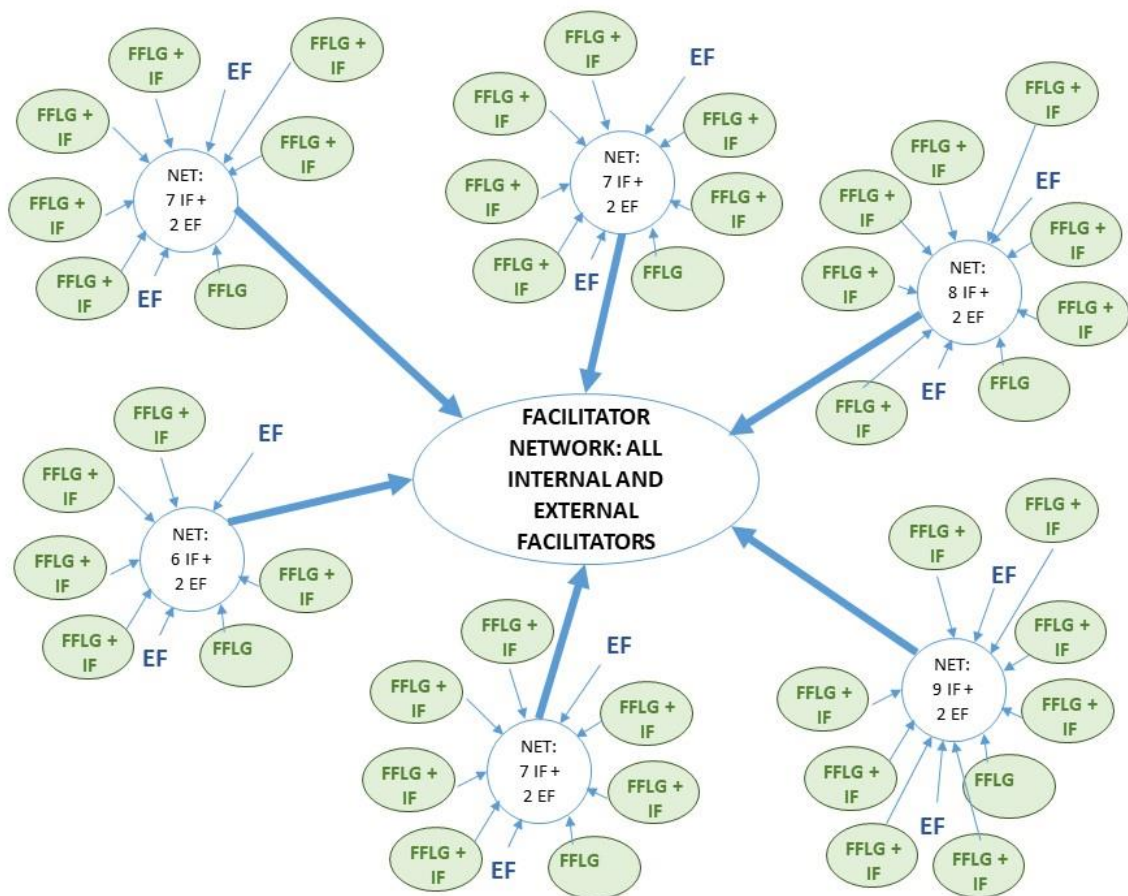


Figure 6.1 illustrating how networks of FFLGs and facilitators worked in the company Sulma Foods Ltd. The 6 Facilitator Networks form a big Facilitator Network, which is registered at District level.

Sulma Foods Ltd. has main focus on dried and fresh fruit, as well as maize and beans. In addition to this, the company had increasing focus on diversifying their production and market at different local, national and international markets, to be more resilient. The company had developed a strategy, where they now put stronger weight on asking for certain products and encourage the farmers to produce those products. The seed multiplication program (described in section 3.6) made this strategy possible: they provided people with seeds, suckers and small trees/seedlings, enabling the farmers to produce things for which there was a good market, e.g. coffee, cassava, sweet potatoes and others, and they held training sessions for farmers in managing these different productions.

The FFLGs were described as a key to continued production and marketing of produce from the company, because the farmers improved their skills and

collaboration by participating in these groups. There were definitely challenges, which needed to be addressed, e.g. storage facilities both at farm and FFLG levels. Through the structures of FFLGs and FFLG-and facilitator networks, the company can train the farmers in post-harvest handling and improving the quality of all produce. The company has tried to persuade the farmers to do record keeping at home, and at FFLG levels, but only with little success. Records on savings were always kept – and involved all group members - but e.g. production records on household level were very limited. The farmers producing for Sulma Foods ltd. faced many challenges at different levels, e.g. their kitchen gardens were challenged by chicken and neighbors’ free range animals (but they also produced most of their own food at home). Effects of climate change was generally mentioned as a major challenge. Price fluctuations on the market was also experienced, but the farmers were attracted to the company and its structures of FFLG because they could see the benefits of compiling their produce and selling it together, despite the mentioned challenge of storage capacity, and challenges like varying quality of the products, and the fluctuations of demand and supply.

Marketing Associations in continued development

While collecting and editing the material for this little book, the MAs had existed for relatively few years and were still under development. The FFLGs and the organisations, of which they were part, also continued their development and changed with the ever-changing conditions and situations. Every MA is shaped by a certain context, which partly sets the scene and gives opportunities and limitations. As this case through its rapid expansion and development, followed by a quite dramatic decline, a constant learning process follows the ups and downs of such development pathways, and every MA has to find its way and learn ‘what it is to be a business’, and be a player at the market. All the cases presented in this chapter and this book have their own unique development story, and challenges as well as successes and opportunities. The construction of the MA including the decision making processes and the emphasis on how mutual learning can happen, e.g. through transparency and common reflection, seems like in the case of FFLGs, to be paramount for the effectiveness and suitability of the way in which each individual MA responds to the ever-changing environments.

Box 6.9 tells the story about how the MA Kaghema Agheterane Cooperative Society Limited had to find a way to find sustainable markets and get fair prices. This MA came from one of SATNET's member organisations in Bundibugyo, where the citizens had experienced devastating rebel activities from DR Congo during the early 2000s, forcing them into camps, which later turned into villages, in which people stayed, also when peace came. However, many families also returned to their original homes, and the FFLG Kaghema was initiated at this point. The internal facilitator took over very soon after the establishment, and the group managed to work as a strong group and had good results, including good results with their main crop, cocoa. In 2013, two FFLGs with a total 10 men and 11 women, founded the Kaghema Agheterane Co-operative Society Ltd. with the vision to *'Sell and market together for a better price'*. Their mission was *'To eradicate poverty at household level'*, and their goals ranged from empowerment, better bargaining power to enabling all families to pay school fees and medical care. They reached these targets and the member households had an improved standard of living. They expanded rapidly to 250 members from 12 FFLGs in 2016. They got funds from the Trust fund to construct a store with an office, and they sold to a cocoa union. They have employed two store keepers and up to ten casual workers, and had many ambitions of purchasing land and expanding. Their vision: *'A leading farmer owned provider of high quality certified organic cocoa beans and services in Bundibugyo district by the year 2021'* mirrored that it was important for them that their cooperative was farmer owned. They highlighted the core values *'Integrity, Honesty, Team Work, Mutual respect and Transparency'* and their mission: *'To promote, empower farmers through producing quality produce and improve sustainable agriculture practices so as to alleviate poverty amongst the farmers' household'*. In 2017 only five FFLGs worked well. They explained the loss of members by the relationship with the bigger coop union, to which they sold all their cocoa. The Union wanted to form sub county level cooperatives to collect/buying cocoa without considering the already existing cooperatives which actually even were members and shareholders of this bigger cooperative union, such as Kaghema and others similar – and which also were members or shareholders of the Union. The farmers did not even get a better price, compared to if they had sold it outside Kaghema. This caused a disagreement in the Kaghema Society Ltd., and some members got out and formed their own MA. SATNET had meetings with the different FFLGs, where they highlighted all the benefits, which previously formed Kaghema MA, and they reconciled to a large extent. After this, they teamed up with other MAs to form a network consisting of members from five other MAs, and stopped selling to this Coop Union, but have registered their network and find their ways on the market. They have registered their network at district level as a CBO in the names of Bundibugyo Farmers Network, under which they are selling their cocoa. In 2019, Kaghema Society Ltd. had 92 members (52 males and 40 females).



FFLG members share work and they share a well-deserved break with something to drink and time for informal talk.

7. PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLES OF FFLGs IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Ten years with FFLG as an approach to sustainable development

The FFLG approach started its development in 2008, and was from the beginning called ‘Organic Farmer Field Schools’. During the first 1½ year of the first project, we saw an amazing development, where people took the approach and formed it according to their needs, in many different ways, but with a strong focus on setting common goals and sharing labor on their farms, as well as setting up a saving and credit system. We realized that it was actually far from a ‘classical FFS approach’, because the groups were social communities, which had a much broader focus than ‘learning in practice with focus on one commodity’.

The different projects had over time also external evaluations. The messages and learnings from these evaluations pointed to many of the same things: agricultural

and agronomic practices improved in many cases, social cohesion became stronger in the communities, and economic stability increased in the households. In some cases, the influences in the local political systems had strengthened, and groups were recognized by the society. The evaluations also pointed to cases where some FFLGs managed to link well up to marketing systems where they could negotiate and bargain with a far stronger outcome than what they had been able to as individual farmers. Overall, one major strength of this approach has – throughout the projects – been that it was not dependent on donations or resources being provided from somewhere else: it always took the starting point in existing resources in the FFLGs. An exception from this principle was made in the last SATNET project, when larger joint marketing initiatives were made: in this case, the existence of a Trust Fund helped Marketing Associations to establish themselves, and in the long run consolidate and create a foundation for a sustainable development.

The FFLG approach to agroecology seen in relation to SDGs

One of the exercises which we in the author team made to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the FFLG approach to agroecology to facilitate a sustainable development of Ugandan farming and food systems, we looked at the the Sustainable Development Goals¹ (SDGs), and looked into how this approach potentially contribute. Of course the UN 2030 agenda mention a range of issues to address under each SDG, and we cannot take it all into consideration. For example, SDG-3 on health focuses on multiple perspectives of eradication of diseases, which of course are beyond the scope of this approach and our discussion. In relation to that principle, we can only focus e.g. on certain aspects, such as general child health, life expectancy and reduction of pollution.

Chapter three in this book explores how FFLG can contribute to different forms of resilience, through examples and stories. From an overall perspective, we conclude that in various ways, the FFLG approach have helped local communities to diversified food grown through methods which have improved the soil without polluting water, soil or food. We suggest that the entire approach contribute to at least 15 of the goals, as will be summarized in the following. Through the strong focus on knowledge generation (described in Chapter 4) about farming and food, health and special issues like climate change mitigation and adaptation, and issues

¹ Look for example: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

connected to processing, quality control and marketing of products, education is addressed. However, many FFLGs also have explicit goals of all the children should be in school, and hence SDG 4 (education) is addressed in many ways. As become very apparent from chapter 5, the strong focus on the household involvement and the benefit to the entire families, SDG-5 (gender equality) is clearly addressed. In addition, the FFLG approach strengthens the coherence in households and local communities, which more generally contributes to reduced inequalities (SDG-10, about ‘reduced inequalities’), and helps to more sustainable communities, as described in Chapter 3 (SDG-11: sustainable cities and communities). Obviously, a main-focus of the entire work in the group is about farming and to produce sufficient healthy food which certainly aims a zero hunger situations (SDG-2), but more than that: nourishing sustainable varied diets (addressing SDG-12: responsible consumption and production). This can lead to good health and well-being (SDG-3), as well as increased production and income generation (SDG-1 no poverty). When the FFLGs started taking initiatives to joint marketing and created Marketing Associations, they opened for the possibilities for involvement of and jobs to young people (SDG-8: Decent work and economic growth). The Marketing Association development also encourage the development of smaller and medium-size businesses, which in different ways contributes to SDG-9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). All farming improvement addressed in all projects and FFLG developments focused on climate mitigating and adaptive agroecological methods, which in addition to the above also contributes to clean water and sanitation (SDG-6) and is a very practical form of climate action (SDG-13), and strongly promotes sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems in all ways (SDG-15). The strengthened communities join forces, capacities and outreach in the society, and raise voices for general improvements of infrastructure, schools, health systems and other societal institutions (SDG-16 addressing peace, justice and strong institutions; SDG-17 on partnerships for the goals).

Control over food, seed and land is paramount for sustainability

Social cohesion in families and communities: keys to control over food

Collaboration within families is a key to successful FFLGs, and the families are important institutions in reaching food sovereignty in local communities. Many efforts have focused on women empowerment, which is without any doubt a crucial focus point – the question is just to involve the entire family in this: all will be

empowered, and nobody ‘de-powered’ in the breakage of unhealthy power relations in the family. Women empowerment happens best when the entire household and family is involved. We became increasingly aware of the importance of this concept. The families started planning together, and making book keeping and records, which made cash flows visible for all in the family, and enabled everybody to discuss investments on informed basis. The sharing of responsibilities and the mutual understanding of each other including roles, contributed to mutual respect and acknowledgement. Furthermore, we saw a clear benefit of involving children and young people. Many young people became increasingly interested in agriculture, saw it as a future viable business opportunity, and became skilled and more involved in the activities and decisions. In many families, important decisions were taken jointly, e.g. regarding use of land for family food and for cash crops.

Building social capital in local communities is the next key to control over food, and the importance of this proved to be enormous. Many FFLG-members expressed that they had got something, which their local community had lost half a generation or more ago. In some cases, they had never experienced it themselves, but just heard about how local communities were more closely connected and helping each other, but due to many factors such as migration patterns, disturbances and displacements due to conflicts in the area, and new stronger types of alcohol being present, they had lost this. Many of the social structures had been disrupted, and now people started working together and helping each other again. Saving and credit schemes were part of most – if not all – FFLGs, which also created a strong commitment and bond between people. The many examples in this book – telling about all kinds of sharing and committing oneself and the family to taking part in the local community, demonstrated the care and social capital in its many forms. At one visit to a village, the FFLG group explained that the process, which they had been through, had enabled them to stand together and e.g. reject trucks which came with pesticides e.g. as gifts from campaigning parliament members before an election. First, they had learned about more sustainable farming methods, and next, they felt strong together.

Context specific knowledge and flexibility

The FFLG members share knowledge, experience and skills, and generates in this way insight and modes of action, which are relevant and specific for every context. Furthermore, each group develops own visions and decides own goals and way of working, based on members’ capacities, focus and skills. This makes a very flexible

approach. Context-specific learning and knowledge are paramount for strengthening food sovereignty on a local level, and addressing context relevant issues to the local and regional political institutions, authorities and civil societies. It seems obvious that learning necessarily must take place in the location where it should be used, and by the persons who need it – yet many initiatives build on inputs and elements brought in from far away, and rely on the knowledge brought with it. Relevant, embedded knowledge developed commonly in a group, which use methods that are owned by everybody who use them, has the potential to push development towards more food sovereignty in an area. When people use farming approaches which are based on complex interactions between natural, social, ecological and agricultural systems, complex knowledge is needed, and this can be generated through shared experiences and common learning. Many agroecological solutions furthermore require collaboration, because they can only be applied on farm-level, but has to involve e.g. landscapes or populations, e.g. combatting some vectors by trapping them, or ensuring clean water. Likewise, complex social situations like political and armed conflict in the Rwenzori region, migrations, alcoholism, and gender issues, require complex solutions and understanding on multiple levels – if possible to overcome such challenges, this can only be developed in the place where it is needed, by the people, who need it.

Income generation and joint marketing initiatives

Joint marketing of produce can be a relevant activity, e.g. in a marketing association which involves one or more FFLGs. Two strategies were generally considered as strengthening local control over food: a) selling surplus of own production on local markets, and b) forming Marketing Associations, which involved one or more FFLGs, and focused on one or few cash crop, either ‘raw’ or processed to some extent.

From the beginning of the first project, we saw how the families managed to produce more varied food and food in larger quantities, which enabled them to sell the surplus of own food production. This was the immediately most viable strategy, which could be easily adopted by any family and any group, and never would create risk for food insecurity, in contrast to the situation where land was allocated to a cash crop, which for some reason turned out to be a ‘bad business’. This strategy often involved the females in the household, because it involved ‘the normal food crops’. Furthermore, this strategy contributed particularly to the local market and exchange of healthy

food, grown without pesticides, and providing local income – so in many ways contributed to the local food sovereignty.

The other strategy – growing cash crops - required land which could be particularly allocated to a cash crop, unless it easily was intercropped with existing crops, which in some cases was possible with vanilla and some herbs like rosemary. Traditionally, the husband was in charge of cash crops and income, but in the FFLG, patterns were often changed at least to the extent that plans about investments were shared and discussed in the household.

Closing remarks and areas for future developments ...

FFLGs are built on networks – we need to be active and conscious to keep them alive

The idea of Farmer Family Learning Groups is based on social capital and the keys, repeatedly mentioned and unfolded in various ways in this book: mutual trust, everybody's ownership, collaboration, common goals and learning. Networks are paramount parts of this, and they do not come automatically and by themselves. They require active work and constant conscious development and negotiation. When they work, they give all the personal investments back again, manifold, and reach out into the future.

The facilitators are paramount for the FFLGs

As illustrated through stories and examples, FFLGs cover multiple aspects of resilience and can contribute much to farmer families' and communities' livelihood. One of the absolute backbones of a well working FFLG is the presence of skilled facilitators:

- The external facilitator, who is a driver to initiate the FFLG, or transform a community or farmer group into a FFLG, and later will be the one mentoring the internal facilitator,
- The internal facilitator is selected among and by the FFLG members, and will be the one taking care of the day-to-day management of the FFLG, including making sure about appointments for meetings and activities, and solving problems and issues in the group.

The challenge we have seen occasionally has been a 'dilution' of facilitator skills and clarity of roles and responsibilities, because FFLGs were established like rings in the water. This can be seen as a 'dream scenario' when considering FFLGs as a

method of creating coherence, and building social capital and resilience in farmer communities – but the weakness is if there are no resources available to properly mentor or educate more facilitators. It is important that facilitators get the mode of action in FFLGs clear and under the skin, for example that the tasks of a facilitator is not the same as a ‘chairperson’ or ‘a teacher’. A facilitator ensures for example that everybody – men, women and all age groups – can speak freely and feel safe and well in the group, and that there are no unhealthy dominations or power plays going on. This requires some experience and thoughts, and in some cases mentoring and discussions, to develop skills to be able to do this. A successful alliance between a facilitator and the group is established when the group members agree to give the facilitator the authority to for example lead processes where they set goals, and to negotiate solutions, also in times of tension. If some group members seem to drop out, or do not turn up at meetings to take ‘their part of the work’, they all have to agree that there is one person whom they respect, when he or she approaches them to find a solution. The networks as e.g. illustrated in Figure 6.1 and described in several places in this book, can help new facilitators to acquire skills, but educated facilitators are also needed.

‘Participatory monitoring’ as a potential tool to follow up on common visions and goals

As a part of the development of FFLGs or MAs, we kept searching for ways to keep ourselves on the track towards fulfilling the goals and aims, which we set as groups. It was actually a very simple way, based on the idea that we all have visions and goals in life. We can formulate our own personal visions and goals, but if we are two or more persons, then we need to sit together and identify the common goal, and plan how we reach this goal. A FFLG or MA can share goals and help each other to reach them, and Participatory Monitoring can be part of it².

It is actually not complicated. It involves the people who are part of the plan. It is a natural part of planning for the future to find out how we keep on track and follow our plan, as e.g. is described in Box 3.13 about the group Umoja. In practice, it was more challenging for many groups, because it still required that they sat together and made plans – so it does require a focused contribution.

² Participatory monitoring was described in February 2016 in a small booklet:

<http://orgprints.org/30157/1/Frameworkand-tools-for-participatory-monitoring-final-version-last-7th-Feb-2016.pdf>.

We worked with the following step:

- 1) Think about and discuss, first as an individual, and then in your family, and lastly in your FFLG or MA: ‘Where did we come from? Where are we now? And: where do we want to go?’
 - 2) Monitoring is simply measuring whether we are on the right track to our goals:
 - a. We identify a common goal and
 - b. We plan how to get there,
 - c. We identify how and when we monitor whether we are on the right track.
- It is that simple!
- 3) Indicators are the signs we use to find out whether we are on the right track.

Linking up to institutional frameworks including political and democratic structures

In the booklet ‘The Rwenzori Experience’³ we looked at the FFLGs from the angles of environmental, social, economic and institutional sustainability. In this process, we realised that the focus on agroecological farming through joint learning in FFLGs strengthened the environmental, social and economic aspects of the farmer families and communities. We concluded that it strengthened their resilience as families, in their farms, in local communities.

The outreach to political structures and decision making systems remained a challenge. Many FFLGs and MAs have gained recognition in the community and surrounding society in terms of e.g. being acknowledged in different agricultural programs. Many groups have managed to successfully advocate for local roads, electricity or water systems to become established to the benefit of the entire community. However, when it comes to larger political or institutional developments, many FFLGs and MAs have not yet developed capacity or mobilized resources to involve themselves in a joint effort. In the light of major environmental challenges, loss of seed diversity and other sovereignty issues, these aspects need to have high priority in future development of FFLGs and MAs and their networks.

³ <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/end/pdf/end15.pdf>

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Gliessman, S. R. 2015. *Agroecology: The ecology of sustainable food systems*, third ed., 371. New York: Taylor & Francis.

More to read from the FFLG projects:

‘The Rwenzori Experience’, Third World Network:
<http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/end/pdf/end15.pdf>

The FFLG facilitator manual: <http://orgprints.org/19341/>

FAO-book: ‘Mainstreaming organic agriculture into the African development agenda’: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3294e/i3294e.pdf> (page 162 onwards)

Framework and catalogue of tools for Participatory monitoring for Farmer Family Learning Groups and Marketing Associations: <http://orgprints.org/30157/>

Lasse Englyst Olsen: Designing for learning:
<http://orgprints.org/25076/1/25076.pdf>

Discussion note, ‘Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue’, Janu. 2014, The Hague:
http://www.iss.nl/sites/corporate/files/2014_Discussion_Notes_Mette_Vaarst.pdf

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EPILOGUE: A WORLD WHERE WE ALL CAN TAKE OUR FUTURE IN OUR OWN HAND – TOGETHER ...

Farmer Family Learning Group is one among many practical way of organizing a group or a local community for taking their own futures in their own hands. We saw that families and local communities became stronger and more resilient in different ways, by improving their own situations in the families, on their farms and in their communities, socially, environmentally, financially and with regard to outreach in the wider society. We saw many being successful in joining forces to market their product and increasingly generate an income, and we noticed that many FFLGs gradually started interacting with others in the local political and institutional framework, and this was inspirational far beyond their own smaller circles.

We saw it work – but there are situations which create so bad conditions that even a strong Farmer Family Learning Group is challenged. It must constantly be worked with, and the environment must allow, and even encourage this, politically, socially, environmentally – in all ways. This is a common societal, institutional and social responsibility.

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