

CARE and FAO's Partnership for Global Gender Equality and Innovative Farmer Field Schools



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What are Farmer Field Schools?

The Farmer Field School (FFS) approach was developed in the late 1980s by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). It was created as a capacity approach to empower producers and rural communities by strengthening their decision-making skills in the field, using ecological learning, systems analysis, experimentation, and group-building. This approach was built on people-centered learning and participatory methods to create an environment conducive to exchanging knowledge and experiences safely. FFS includes practical field exercises using direct observation, experimentation, discussions, and decision-making that encourage learning by doing. Farmers can then test their local knowledge and new scientific innovations in their fields within their local ecosystem and specific socioeconomic contexts.

Since its inception, FAO has been promoting FFS to address a broad range of problems and technical domains in over 90 countries over the past 3 decades. Over the years, this approach has been expanded and adapted to different contexts, populations, organizations, and needs with nonnegotiable including:

- Farmers' needs defining and driving FFS programs;
- Farmers' local knowledge co-producing and co-creating new knowledge, science, and public services alongside knowledge and formal extension services;
- Making learning processes and knowledge generation central to FFS programs.

The Contribution of CARE's FFBS to FFS

According to [FAO](#), globally, 36 percent of working women and 38 percent of working men work in agrifood systems as of 2019. In sub-Saharan Africa, 66 percent of women's employment is in agrifood systems, compared with 60 percent of men's. In southern Asia, women overwhelmingly work in agrifood systems (71 percent of women, versus 47 percent of men), although fewer women than men are in the labor force.

However, women remain severely underserved by extension and advisory services across the globe because of barriers related to social and gender norms among others. While the FFS approach has been adopted by many organizations, a need arose for the integration of gender equality programming and market-based approaches to ensure underlying norms (both formal and informal) are also addressed, especially those that limit women's meaningful participation, integration, leadership, decision making, and financial benefits.

Through CARE's Farmer Field and Business School (FFBS) approach, which is an adaptation of FFS, CARE is promoting and implementing a gender equality, market-based, and nutrition-sensitive approach to agricultural extension to help address a range of challenges and close the gender gap. The FFBS approach works by empowering women to address social and gender norm barriers, engaging men and boys to champion gender equality, supporting women small-scale producers, and increasing food security and good nutrition.

As seen through the featured statistics, gender equality programming has been proven to be effective. A Social Cost Benefit Analysis of FFBS conducted by the New Economics Foundation also showed the cost effectiveness of the approach with a USD 31 return for every USD 1 invested.¹ This was split between women's empowerment, improved food security, and higher incomes. FFBS shows the potential of FFS to deliver gender equality and market-based outcomes!

Increased agricultural yield:

According to FAO, WF and IFAD, [agricultural production for FFBS participants increased by as much as 56%](#) for some crops.

Increased household income:

FFBS households' monthly income increased from \$3.41 to \$9.90 in Ghana and from \$11.60 to \$17.38 in Malawi ([Pathways program final evaluation](#)).

Better nutrition:

62% of the FFBS households in the [Win-Win project in Burundi](#) had acceptable food consumption scores.

FAO and CARE's Partnership

For several years, CARE and FAO have collaborated to empower farmers all around the world. CARE's partnership with FAO on farmer-led learning and the FFS approach has evolved over twenty years due to a mutual commitment to issues such as participatory learning, equity and social inclusion, indigenous knowledge, nutrition, economic empowerment, and market engagement. CARE has drawn upon and adapted the FAO FFS model in many contexts and learned from its application as well as its scale out.

i) The Farmer Field and Business School Approach

Between 2012 and 2015, CARE developed the [Farmer Field and Business School](#) approach, under the [Pathways to Empowerment](#) program funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This approach aimed to improve small-scale women farmer's productivity and profitability by empowering women to engage in agriculture systems more fully and equitably. Though FFBS builds on the traditional Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, it is distinct as it is an integrated approach and curriculum. In addition to demonstrating sustainable agriculture practices that can increase yields, the FFBS curriculum builds capacity and essential skills around market engagement, gender and empowerment issues, nutrition practices, and performance monitoring.

Through our new collaboration with FAO's global Farmer Field School platform, CARE and FAO aim to scale out FFS in ways that ensure gender equality outcomes, improve Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning processes to strengthen the implementation of FFS and contribute to the attainment of SGDs. This collaboration is centered on four key objectives:

1. Increase learning, knowledge exchange and dissemination of good practices regarding gender equality FFS with a focus on gender equality, business and markets;
2. Increase the impact and scale out of the FFS model through pathways such as digitization, advocacy and policy influencing;
3. Strengthen the monitoring, evaluation, and learning process of FFS to ensure the implementation of quality programs and projects;
4. Enhance staff capacity especially on gender equality approaches implemented through FFS. Through this collaboration, both organizations hope to unlock and enhance FFS's potential to support women's empowerment and advance gender equality.

ii) Women's Empowerment Farmer Business School (WE-FBS)

Drawing on CARE's experience of FFBS development, FAO, CARE, and Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) developed the Women's Empowerment Farmer Business School (WE FBS) approach that aims to contribute to greater gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture, specifically in a commercial farming environment. It places women's economic empowerment (WEE) at the center of the change process, by applying a gender perspective to business skills development interventions and the promotion of family farming as a business. This new

approach is based on lessons from FAO's Farmer Field Schools (FFS), Farmer Field and Life Schools (FFLS), Farm Business Schools (FBS), and draws heavily on CARE's Farmer Field and Business School (FFBS) and Oxfam's Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS).

Initial conversations on the WE-FBS approach begun in 2014 between CARE, FAO and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT). The CARE Food and Water Systems team members collaborated with FAO to deliver Capacity Development workshops in Kenya in 2018 and 2019. During the 2019 workshop, CARE and FAO agreed to formalize the partnership to implement the WE FBS approach.

Accordingly, CARE and FAO signed the Letter of Agreement on 17th December 2020 for CARE to provide capacity development services to FAO.

iii) Gender Equality Approaches

CARE and FAO collaborated towards the development of a step-by-step guide on how to incorporate GTAs in FAO programming throughout the project cycle (planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) for food security and nutrition, agricultural and rural development and poverty reduction projects. A separate Letter of agreement was used through financial support from the European Union in the framework of the Joint Programme on Gender Equality Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition (JP GTA); implemented by the three Rome Based Agencies (RBAs).

CARE's collaboration on the three major initiatives; Farmer Field Schools, and WE-FBS and Gender Equality Approaches, is with the Office of Innovation, and Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division respectively.