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## Scaling up the Farmer Field and Business School Approach Globally

### Introduction

CARE's [Farmer Field and Business School \(FFBS\)](#), an approach originally developed under CARE's [Pathways to Empowerment program](#), focuses on improving small-scale women farmers' productivity and profitability by empowering women to more fully engage in equitable agriculture systems, using an integrated, gender-transformative, market-based and nutrition sensitive extension approach.

Building on FAO's traditional [Farmer Field Schools \(FFS\)](#) approach, FFBS is a hands-on, learning-by-doing approach through which groups of farmers meet regularly during the course of the cropping or livestock production cycle to learn about new agricultural techniques and technologies and to experiment these treatments on group-managed demonstration sites. FFBS participants typically operate in groups of 25-30 farmers drawn from diverse collectives including [Village Savings and Loans Association \(VSLAs\)](#), producer groups, marketing groups and other common interest groups that coalesce around the production and marketing of a particular enterprise. FFBS sessions are led by a trained facilitator who works with a community-based trainer, or CBT (variously called farmer-to-farmer trainers, facilitators, paraprofessionals, junior experts, and community volunteers).

FFBS is distinct as it is gender transformative, and an integrated approach and curriculum. In addition to demonstrating sustainable, regenerative, and climate-resilient agricultural practices that can increase yields, mitigate food loss and waste, and promote food safety, the FFBS curriculum builds capacity and essential skills around collective market engagement including through entrepreneurship and certification, gender equality and empowerment, nutrition practices, and participatory performance monitoring. Moreover, the curriculum builds small-scale producers' capacity to hold agricultural extension advisory service providers accountable through a participatory [Community Score Card](#) process followed by advocacy for improved access and quality of services.



How Pathways participants visualized the importance of integration of the FFBS components (updated based on feedback after implementation in 28 projects).

Equally important, the FFBS training cycle follows the agriculture seasonal production cycle, ensuring that learning activities are timed to be applicable to farmers in real-time—whether it be a germination test at pre-sowing stage, or a gender dialogue around workload sharing during the labor-intensive weeding period. Timing sessions according to the seasonal and production calendar is crucial for maximizing and ensuring learning happens in real time, and it also respects the time and schedules of women farmers.

FFBS integrated approach is based on the evidence from previous projects' theories of change including [Pathways to Empowerment](#), a women in agriculture program implemented in 6 countries, [A Win-Win for Gender, Agriculture and Nutrition: Testing a Gender-Transformative Approach from Asia in Africa](#), and supporting program data from 32 projects in 17 countries, which illustrate that the integration of these key technical components is essential to transform the lives and livelihoods of women small-scale producers. Robust evidence indicates that FFBS has the potential to catalyze deeper change, contributes to gender equality and women's empowerment, results in increased yields and household income, improved resilience to shocks, improved food systems, dietary diversity and good nutrition, and it is cost efficient with an average \$31 return on every \$1 investment ([Pathways SCBA Report](#)).

## Scaling The Approach

With proven success of the approach, CARE is scaling FFBS through a six-year Scaling Up FFBS (SUFFBS) program funded by the Sall Family Foundation (SFF). The program will upscale FFBS to improve the lives of 25 million poor people (women small-scale producers and their families) over six years, 2022–2027. Upscaling FFBS presents a unique and exciting opportunity to achieve catalytic impact for women small-scale producers around the globe. These impacts will be compounded to reach nearly 100 million additional people, including consumers being able to buy better food from the farmers and communities at large benefiting from a stronger local economy.

CARE is scaling FFBS through four pathways that adapt to the country and context:

1. **Expanding** the FFBS approach to new countries selected based on a combination of factors, including levels of food insecurity, climate hotspots, team readiness and possibilities to leverage funding.
2. **Deepening** all FFBS, new and old, to ensure the approach is more climate-responsive and better linked

with local markets. Targets new users, such as pastoralists and coastal communities, youth, refugees, and internally displaced people. Additionally, one-time matching grants will be provided as start-up capital for farmers' groups that have completed training as a one-time kick-off investment for the farmers' group capitalization.

3. **Engaging farmers with global markets through a certification model** with accreditation bodies to help women farmers be more productive, support FFBS growth and create a self-sufficient system.
4. **Promoting the adoption of FFBS by governments** by working at national and global levels to influence governments, multi-lateral agencies, academic institutions, and private sector companies to provide equitable livelihoods and improve nutrition for small-scale farmers, especially women, through the FFBS approach.



*FFBS participants in Tanzania during their recent harvest of soybean and sunflower crops.*

## Progress to Date

### Expansion & Deepening

The program, in its second year of implementation, influences **60 global projects** spanning **33 countries (18 countries<sup>1</sup>)** with projects fully funded by the SFF SUFFBS program). When considering this, **1,084,349 producers and their families** have been reached and **11,657 groups for FFBS have been formed** as of June 30, 2023. Since its inception in 2012, **4.6M small-scale producers** and their household members were reached through FFBS. We have deepened the sectors, contexts and population groups we work with to further enrich the existing FFBS curriculum and support people to drive their own resilience and food security. Beyond the **crop sector**, we are working with **livestock keepers, beekeepers** and **fisherfolk**. We have piloted FFBS programming in **refugee, fragile and conflict area contexts**, which has resulted in great successes to date despite challenging circumstances; and we are working with many new **population groups** such as **refugees, internally displaced people, landless farmers, youth, people with disabilities** and **indigenous populations**.

#### KENYA

In **Kenya**, the FFBS Program recently secured a partnership with Hello Tractor and CARE's Innovation unit. Through FFBS this partnership aims at transforming 60 producer groups into 3 social enterprise cooperatives. Each cooperative is provided with a tractor, not only creating direct employment opportunities for participants as operators and mechanics but will most importantly increase mechanization services that are set to increase tillage from 984.23 to 1,476.35 hectares.

To view a brief video about the success of this project in Kenya, please click the link [here](#).

#### GEORGIA

In **Georgia**, the project implemented an advocacy campaign alongside the Association of Beekeepers of Georgia against the state's unplanned process of poisoning with various pests, which causes the death of bee colonies; thus, impacting the livelihoods of FFBS beekeeping participants. The campaign resulted in a written agreement between the project and the State Department, changing its processes to better suit the farmers' beekeeping needs and benefit beekeepers throughout the country.

To meet the needs of this rapidly growing program working with many new sectors, contexts and populations,

<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh, Egypt, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Palestine, Peru, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Türkiye and Uganda.

the FFBS curriculum has been updated to include new subjects and modules, refined tools and additional resources. Based off feedback and lessons learned from country-level staff and FFBS participants, the **FFBS Toolkit for Crops** now has refreshed tools related to agro-ecology, regenerative agriculture, climate-resilient agriculture, conservation agriculture and other approaches. The toolkit also has a variety of newly developed modules on topics such as

Collectives, Certification Schemes, Entrepreneurship, Agricultural Finance, Food Safety, and Food Loss and Waste. Additionally, modules on Service Systems Strengthening and Social Accountability covering advocacy and an adapted version of CARE's Community Score Card to help farmer groups assess, plan, monitor and evaluate services related to FFBS (e.g., extension services), have been added. An **FFBS Toolkit for Livestock** is also in the final stages of development, and an **FFBS Toolkit for Fisheries** is in progress.

Another top priority of the program has been the development of the **FFBS Guidance Note for Minimum Standards**. The intention of this document is to equip country-level staff and implementors with the rationale and theoretical basis of the FFBS model, as well as provide “must have” and “nice to have” core components, guidance principles and reference documents to amplify impact, increase effectiveness and maintain the fidelity of the model across the global landscape.

### Certification

The accreditation model being jointly developed with CARE and [Fairtrade America](#) is ongoing and will build on and catalyze the FFBS program. Diverse, context-sensitive models will be piloted once inception plans have been finalized. This will be a key focus in Y3 - Y6 (2024 - 2027) of the SFF SUFFBS program. **CARE Egypt Foundation** focused on small-scale producers engaged in tomato production with the potential of including processing (Food Safety and Good Agricultural Practices) will be supported through the [Global GAP Certification](#), which was identified as the top ranked certification for facilitating farmers' access to global markets. Learnings from this pilot will enhance certification efforts and enable further expansion globally. The project team in Uganda has also initiated partnership discussions with [Fairtrade Africa](#).

### Government Adoption

Advocacy interventions in the SUFFBS program are underway and have already shown some incredible results. A few key successes: The government of **Tanzania** is in the process of adopting the FFBS approach into their National Agriculture Extension guidelines, and ongoing advocacy efforts in **Uganda** show positive momentum towards government adoption as well. In **Kenya**, Homabay County has mainstreamed the FFBS curriculum in its Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development technical handbook on ground nuts and sorghum and is working with the FFBS program to build the capacity of agriculture extension workers as well as to expand FFBS curriculum to VSLA groups and other soy and sorghum producers. Though it is uncertain how the crisis in **Palestine** will impact the forward traction of the FFBS project, the Ministry of Agriculture recently pledged support to adopt the FFBS approach, and the Minister of Agriculture announced that they would remove the 16% tax on fodder for sheep and goats to support the livestock keepers.

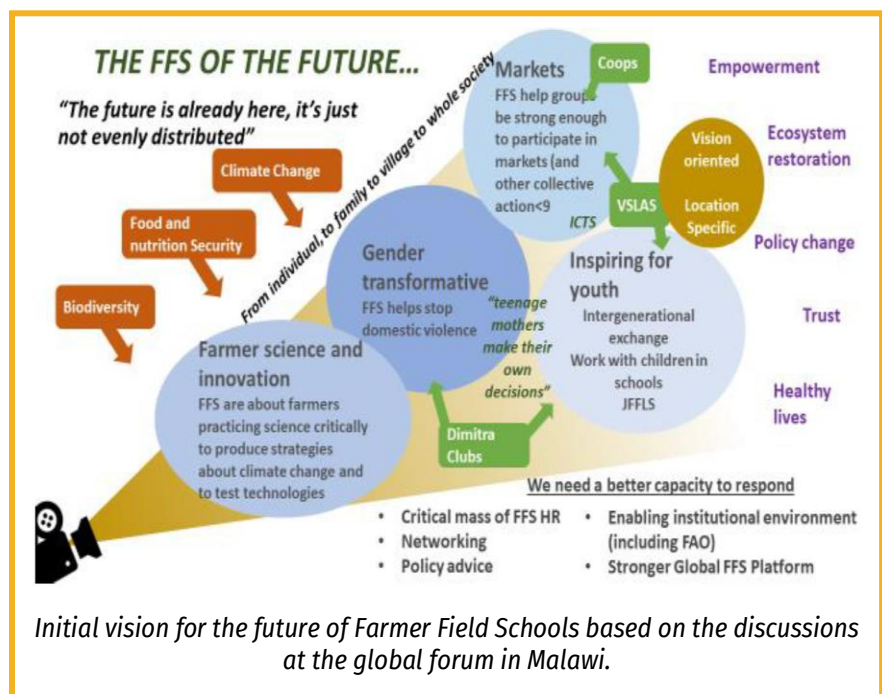


In **Nepal**, local governments in two municipalities have agreed to pay private landowners the lease amount for their land for 5-10 years, so that Dalits Groups for FFBS, including ethnic minorities, can have access to land. CARE Nepal is supporting the Dalit groups by providing production input support, installation of irrigation facilities, and technical support. This opportunity provides access to land to a group widely discriminated against on the basis of caste and “untouchability”, so this is a great success and will be beneficial learning for other country teams globally. The image above shows FFBS participants in Nepal during a recent nutrition session in September 2023. To learn more about the FFBS project in Nepal, view the video here.

To view a brief video about the success of this project, please click the link [here](#).

A surprising win in our efforts to scale FFBS has been the interest by academic institutions to adopt the FFBS approach. In **Tanzania**, CARE and [Sokoine University of Agriculture \(SUA\)](#) developed two Degree Courses on FFBS; AEX 107 Gender Transformative Approaches for Sustainable Agricultural Development, and AEX 211 - Farmer Field and Business School (FFBS), and revised an existing course, AEX 100 Agricultural Extension, to integrate aspects of FFBS. Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture Training Institutes (MATI) is in the process of integrating the FFBS approach into the courses of 14 Government Training Institutes for enhancing the extension delivery system. There is also strong potential for FFBS curriculum adoption at [EARTH University](#) in **Costa Rica**, at the four prestigious agriculture universities (Nasarawa, Jigawa, Bauchi, and Kebbi) in **Nigeria**, at Zamorano University in **Honduras**, and at Busitema University in **Uganda**. Additionally, **CARE Peru** is working in partnership with [Catholic University Sedes Sapientiae \(UCSS\)](#) and **CARE Caucasus (Georgia)** staff are training university students at [Zugdidi University](#) on beekeeping.

Through a joint partnership, SFF program is supporting FAO to **integrate FFBS’ unique gender-transformative, and market-based approaches and participatory monitoring tools** in their Farmer Field Schools. CARE played a major role in advocating for the integration of gender transformative approaches in FFS during a global forum in Malawi held from June 14<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup>, 2023. This global forum on the future of farmer field schools for sustainable agrifood systems was organized by FAO with over 100 participants from around the world representing farmers, governments, international organizations, private sector, producer organizations and civil society, all working towards more sustainable agrifood systems through farmer field schools. The event focused on the future of Farmer Field Schools (FFS), after more than 30 years since the conception of the approach. Discussions focused on innovations, strategy for the future, priority areas and implementation mechanisms. CARE also supported FAO in organizing a process of online consultations engaging organizations worldwide to reflect on the future of FFS. The consultations provide an opportunity to include concrete gender objectives and launch an integrated plan to transform harmful gender norms across FFS programmes so that organizations can now be more intentional in integrating women’s empowerment and gender equality into FFS’ future. To this end, in collaboration with CARE and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), FAO organized a webinar called “Sowing Seeds of Change: The Potential of Farmer Field Schools for Women’s Empowerment” to discuss the relevance of FFS for gender equality and transformation. More than 250 people attended the event, including practitioners, FAO representatives, IFAD and other interested national and international organizations. As a result of the online consultations and the in-person global forum and through significant contributions from CARE, FAO recently redefined the *future of the FFS approach* to be gender transformative and market based – a key achievement and the core goal for CARE’s partnership with FAO. In addition, CARE will support FAO in the development of the gender and MEAL strategies for the global FFS Platform. Towards strengthening MEL in FFS, as follow up the global partners meeting, capacity development on participatory monitoring and outcome mapping/gender progress marker is being planned and is paving way for advancing GTA.



## Current Scope: Presence and Sectors

