



Innovation Brief

The Farmer Field and Business School A Pathways Programming Approach

ABOUT PATHWAYS CARE's Pathways program focuses on improving poor smallholder women farmer's productivity and profitability by empowering women to more fully engage in equitable agriculture systems. Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented in Ghana, Malawi, Bangladesh, India, Mali, and Tanzania, Pathways is designed to improve the food security and livelihood resilience of poor smallholder women farmers and their families. In its first phase, Pathways targets to directly impact 150,000 poor women smallholder farmers in their households and communities, representing 840,000 people across six countries.



A learning by doing approach

With the goal of increasing smallholder women farmer's productivity and profitability, the Farmer Field and Business School (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 experiment and learn about new production and marketing options. Building on the traditional Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, which places emphasis on hands-on management skills based on adult learning principles, the FFBS is unique in its inclusion of community approaches to visioning and planning, sustainable agriculture, market engagement, nutrition, gender, and performance monitoring. FFBS groups are made up of 25-30 farmers drawn from Pathways targeted collectives including VSLAs, producer groups, marketing groups and any other common interest groups that coalesce around the production and marketing of a particular crop or livestock enterprise. Sessions are led by a trained facilitator who works with a group of FFBS community-based facilitators. For Pathways, these community-based facilitators include community based extension agents as in Ghana, Farmer to Farmer Trainers in Malawi, paraprofessionals in Tanzania, Junior experts in Mali and community volunteers in Bangladesh.

WHY THE FFBS?

- The model integrates multiple components including sustainable agriculture practices, market engagement, gender and equity, food and nutrition security, group empowerment and M&E, which ensures that the knowledge, skills and practices of women farmers are built upon in an integrated manner.
- The training cycle follows the seasonal cycle (before, during & after) ensuring that learning and other activities are done in real time without requiring extra time from already time constrained women farmers.
- It builds on existing groups including VSLAs, producer groups, self help groups etc that already have established social capital and governance mechanisms and focuses on the added value of the other Pathways components.
- It is based on adult learning principles that offer practical lessons through participatory approaches. Farmers can then translate this learning and adapt it into their own fields creating ownership and sustainability of adoption.
- Monitoring and evaluation are built into the FFBS enabling farmers to track progress, costs as well as profit and loss and to use this information to make decisions based on farmers' specific circumstances.



Key components of the Pathways FFBS

COMMUNITY DIAGNOSIS AND PLANNING

Before the beginning of the cropping cycle, communities/groups are taken through a visioning process that is forward looking and gets to an agreement of the members' vision and aspirations for the future. This highly interactive process helps to establish dialogue and engage with men and women farmers to identify opportunities and facilitate community action planning. It is also a vehicle for creating awareness on the program and building consensus on the choices and aspirations of men and women as well as starting a dialogue on decision making and gender relations at the household and community levels.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

This component focuses on enhancing the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices in order to increase quality and quantity of products to meet both the food needs of the household and the purchase requirements for identified markets. Due to small land sizes and climate change pressures, there is emphasis on building resilient ecosystems. The Pathways approach to sustainable agriculture includes a combination of practices tailored to suit different agro-climates, value chains and farmer resource endowments.

PATHWAYS APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

SOIL AND NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT Conservation agriculture (CA), intercropping, composting, mulching, ridges

WATER HARVESTING AND USE CA, mulching, ridges, pits

RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS Fallow areas, strips, intercropping, CA

PEST AND DISEASE MANAGEMENT Integrated Pest and Disease Management, use of disease and pest resistant varieties, low risk pesticides

GENETIC RESOURCES Promotion of crop & genetic diversity, participatory plant breeding

POST HARVEST MANAGEMENT AND USE Reduction of post harvest losses, food safety & quality, nutrition and eating, value addition

AGRICULTURE LEARNING AND EXTENSION Information generation, dissemination and uptake

MARKET ENGAGEMENT

This component aims at building the capacity of FFBS members to better understand how markets function and position them to take advantage of existing and emerging market opportunities for their products. The farmers are given an opportunity to understand the different actors within a given value chain, their interrelationships and opportunities for growth and better revenues within that value chain. This component includes trainings as well as interactions with input suppliers, service providers and output market actors. Some of the training topics include marketing basics, business plan development, cost benefit analysis, and negotiation skills. These topics are built in during relevant stages of the cropping cycle. For example, business plan development is integrated within the group planning. A market subcommittee is selected to identify and track market opportunities, negotiate or a multi-stakeholder platform is organized to bring the groups, and other market actors together during critical points of the FFBS cycle.

GENDER AND GROUP EMPOWERMENT

Pathways places women's empowerment at the heart of its work with the belief that by empowering women, agricultural productivity and profitability will increase and household resilience will be improved. To achieve this, the FFBS incorporates three key interventions: (1) Women's empowerment using CARE's Agency, Structure and Relations model (2) Engaging men and boys for improved gender and social relations and (3) empowering collectives and communities. The FFBS integrates specific training modules to create awareness on workload burden/time use, access to and ownership of resources, gender-based violence, household decision making and power analysis among other issues. Some of the sessions are targeted at engaging men and boys to support women's empowerment and changes in gender relations while others go beyond the groups to involve whole communities.

CARE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

AGENCY

HER OWN ASPIRATIONS AND CAPABILITIES

STRUCTURE

THE ENVIRONMENT THAT SURROUNDS AND CONDITIONS

RELATIONS

THE POWER RELATIONS THROUGH WHICH SHE NEGOTIATES HER PATH



NUTRITION AND FOOD SECURITY

The FFBS seeks to promote household resilience through improvements in food and nutrition security at the household and community levels. Specifically, the FFBS focuses on increasing production and productivity; dietary diversity through home gardens and intercropping; increased incomes for food purchases; nutritional and health education through messaging; food utilization by reducing nutrient loss during food preparation and training on appropriate food baskets; and, lastly, value addition and processing for both nutrient preservation and food safety. This multi-dimensional approach is designed to enable healthy food decisions and practices.

FFBS MONITORING AND EVALUATION

CARE's participatory performance tracking tool (PPT) was developed to ensure that producer groups have a means of self-assessing progress and creating transparency as well as social pressure to ensure practice adoption. The PPT tracks both individual use of improved practices as well as the performance of the group. Individual performance focuses on the adoption of key agricultural and marketing practices while the indicators for group performance include governance, gender, and financial health.

The FFBS process

The Farmer Field and Business School establishment process follows a number of well laid out steps as shown. It is designed to begin with heavy input into foundational activities, facilitation, establishment and running of the school, after which there is focus on enhancing sustainability by ensuring that there is less contact with the field facilitators. After graduation, farmers continue to meet, learn and share information and technical knowledge and practices among each other.

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CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE FFBS

To implement the FFBS, CARE staff, partners and the community facilitators go through a five-day training that covers facilitation and visioning skills, the key components of the FFBS, gender equity and group empowerment approaches. The FFBS is a hands on training that uses participatory approaches and field activities.

To learn more, visit the Pathways website at www.carepathwaystoempowerment.org

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