

Learnings from Famer Family Learning Groups

Knowledge and Experiences from the use of Farmer family Learning Groups in Uganda and Tanzania



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List of Abbreviations

A2N – Africa 2000 Network Uganda

CoP – Communities of Practice

ECOSAF – Empowering Civil Society Organizations and Strengthening Food Security for Farmer Families

FFLG – Farmer Family Learning Group

FFS – Farmer Field Schools

IO – Implementing Organization

LPP – Legitimate Peripheral Participation

MO – Member Organization

NOGAMU – National Organic Agricultural Movement Uganda

OD – Organic Denmark

RSPN – Royal Society for Protection of Nature, Bhutan

SATNET – Sustainable Agriculture Trainers Network, Uganda

TOAM – Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement

TOR – Terms of Reference

URDT – Uganda Rural Development and Training Programme

UWAMWIMA – Vegetables and Fruits Farmers Association in Zanzibar

Annex

Annex I: List of informants

Annex II: Interview Guide

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It is my hope that this report will be found useful and can contribute to the work of spreading and improving the FFLG approach in the future.

- Ida Bilander

Summary

The Farmer Family Learning Groups approach is a participatory, dialogue-based agricultural extension approach intended to support smallholder farmer families improve their food security and livelihoods, through the use of organic agriculture. The approach has been used in Uganda and Tanzania since 2008 and has contributed to significant improvements when it comes to food production, local village infrastructure, advocacy, building teamwork and social life in the participating villages. This report outlines the results of the approach, explains the best practices learnt through the years and offers a list of the most important components which must be present during implementation, in order to secure a successful project. Through desk research and interviews, the knowledge and experiences about this approach has been gathered and analyzed in order to create this synthesis, presenting the work of the FFLG approach since it was first implemented in 2008. The success of this approach stems from its participatory nature, its focus on sharing of knowledge and labour, the whole-family involvement and the fact that all learning is based on the farmer's own challenges, needs and circumstances. The FFLG approach has proven to be a good and cost-effective way of improving the lives of smallholder farmers in East Africa, and has the potential to become even more widespread in the future.

Introduction: Relevance and objective of the Report

Since the first project using the Farmer Family Learning Groups (FFLG) approach was commenced in 2008, hundreds of groups have formed, dozens of local organisations have been involved in implementing the approach on a daily basis and up to a 150 external facilitators have been trained in using it. Evaluation reports and a growing interest in joining this work shows an urgent need to look back and gather all information, experiences and knowledge which have been developed during the past 8 years, in order to evaluate and review this way of doing development work and agricultural extension.

The objective of this report is to develop a synthesis which brings together all the experiences and knowledge available about the Farmer Family Learning Groups Approach. Based on evaluation reports, teaching materials, interviews and literature reviews, the knowledge about the approach was gathered, in order to offer a single report outlining the best practices, lessons learnt and most important knowledge that exists about this approach to development work. The work of conducting this study is based on the Terms Of Reference agreed upon before the beginning of the work. The synthesis will be available to all partner organizations, implementing organizations and member organizations involved with Organic Denmark's projects in Uganda and Tanzania, and can be used as teaching material, to spread the knowledge of the approach and as a reference point when developing it further in the future.

The report is divided into 5 sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusions. The first section will briefly explain what the FFLG approach is and how it has developed over time, since it was first piloted in 2008. The next section explains the methodological work behind writing this synthesis, describing the data collection and research which have provided all the knowledge needed to write it. Section 3 provides a summary of the evaluation reports from the projects which have been completed at this time, describing the effects, benefits and challenges involved with using the FFLG approach. As there is still ongoing project in both Uganda and Zanzibar, Tanzania, these evaluation reports do not represent all experiences gained from using the approach. Therefore, qualitative data have been collected which elaborates on the findings of these reports. This data is based on interviews with key informants who have exhaustive knowledge of working with the FFLG approach in practice. All the information from both data collection and evaluation reports are presented in the third section. This section can serve as a guide to the FFLG approach, focusing on those elements and practices which are most important to include in the use of the approach.

Section 4 provides an overview of the learning theories relevant when analysing the data. These theories will serve to give further understanding of the theoretical background for this agricultural extension approach and is used to analyse the collected data in section 5. The analysis will help clarify whether or not the FFLG approach uses these learning theories in the best possible way, where its shortcomings are and what can be done to improve the approach in future projects. In the end, the findings of the report will be summarized and presented in the Conclusion.

1.0 The Farmer Family Learning Group Approach

1.1 The First Years

The work of developing the Farmer Family Learning Groups approach first began in 2008 when Organic Denmark carried out an appraisal for a pilot project in western Uganda, together with SATNET. Based on these findings and previous experience with farmer training, they began to develop the concept, and the first two-year project started in 2009 with the training of the first facilitators. The FFLG approach is inspired by the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, which is an opportunity for learning and practice for farmer groups. The Farmer Field School approach was developed in Asia and originally used to teach smallholder farmers about Integrated Pest Management in rice crops. It has later been used in other areas, including Kenya. It became clear that the FFS approach had several shortcomings, especially when it comes to effective technology transfer and sustainable farmer group development. The FFS approach did not necessarily fit the local context and needs of the farmers in rural Uganda, and the work began to develop a new approach based on the challenges, especially food insecurity and market access, and potentials for organic production identified in the local area.

Farmer Family Learning Groups

- **An Organic Agricultural Extension Approach**
- **A voluntary group of farmer families, involving the whole family**
- **Each farmers field is unique; there is no demonstration farm**
- **Has an External and an Internal Facilitator, who helps facilitate the groups' work**
- **External Facilitators are trained in Organic Agriculture and the FFLG approach**
- **Is based on the principles of Respect, Trust, Equality, Common Learning and Commitment**
- **Has a participatory, dialogue-based, practical approach to learning**
- **The farmers themselves identifies their needs, challenges and goals**
- **Is based on the organic principles of ecology, care, fairness and health and the use of organic and agro-ecological farm practices**
- **All farmers participate in teaching and learning with and from each other, sharing their knowledge and skills with the other members**
- **The groups' work evolves around rotational visits to each members' farm**

Source: (Vaarst, Tibasiima, et al. 2011)

A FFLG is a group of farmer families, who come together to learn from each other, develop new skills, share experiences and in some instances develop into market cooperatives who do cooperative marketing together. Contrary to the FFS approach, the FFLGs do not receive training at demonstration farms, nor do they follow a specific training programme or curriculum. Instead, the FFLG approach is based on the belief that each farmer's field is unique, and all training and teaching takes place on the families' own farms (Vaarst, Tibasiima, et al. 2011). When the groups are formed, the farmers



A GROUP OF FARMERS LEARN HOW TO MAKE A KITCHEN GARDEN DURING A ROTATIONAL VISIT

participate in rotational visits, visiting each of the farmer's farms, one after the other. Prior to the visit, the Facilitator and the host farmer prepare the visit together, talking about the programme of the day, what the farmer would like to focus on and what he needs help with. During the visits, the group members take a tour around the farm while the host farmer explains about his farm, his challenges and needs and the other group members discuss this and give ideas about what can be done to improve the farm. In this way, the host farmer gets concrete and relevant advice, based on his own situation. At the same time, all other group members gain new knowledge on a broad range of subjects, as they rotate between the different farms. To begin with, the farmers teach each other, sharing the knowledge that already exists within the group. Another very important element of the rotational visits is the communal labour. During a visit, all members work together on a task that the host farmer needs help to complete, this might be building a fence, weeding an entire field or planting new crops. This sharing of work is important, because it allows the farmers to take on bigger tasks than they would normally do when working on their own, because they can get a lot of work done in a very short amount of time. One informant elaborates on the benefits of joining together to work on the farms:

“Twenty people can do a lot more work in 2 hours, than one person can do in twenty hours. So it is an entire week's work being done in a very short time, if the entire group joins together.”

(Informant 7, Interview from November 2016)

Other informants point to the fact that this is a very practical way of learning how to work together as a team, which builds trust and a feeling of community to the groups.

Each FFLG is connected to an external facilitator, who is usually an experienced agricultural extension agent, who has received training on organic agriculture and on the FFLG approach. These facilitators do not work as trainers or teachers, their task is to facilitate the group learning process, guiding the group

through the different stages of development, and overseeing the process. Each external facilitator might work with several groups covering a large area. When first formed, each group selects an internal facilitator, who will receive training from the external facilitator and, with time, take over the facilitation of the group. In this way, the sustainability of the groups are secured, as there is someone to continue the work, as the external facilitator moves on to form new groups.

The groups participate in every part of the learning process; from identifying their problems and needs and the areas where they need training, to sharing the knowledge that already exists among the members. They can then request training on specific subjects from the facilitators, if they discover that this knowledge is not already present among the members of the group. This flexible framework allows for every group to develop the FFLG approach in a way that fits their unique situation, context and needs. A core principle in the FFLG approach is the active participation and involvement of every farmer family, in developing their own lives and improve their situation, this way, each farmer takes ownership over the approach, which ensures sustainability over time. One informant talks about how the rotational visits are conducted:

“... They go on the host farmers farm, they look at the good practices, they appreciate and they comprehend. Then when they look at the bad practices, they advise accordingly. So in that process, everyone in the group is learning and getting new information and then everyone in the group is getting new skills [...] If the learning was looking at banana production, then in that visit day they are also going to the next host farmer. The next host farmer may be having beans and maize. And they also get skills on production of maize and beans. So the benefit, when you look at the concept, the farmers get a wide range of experiences”

(Informant 2, Interview from Oct. 2016)

At the end of the first two-year project, all the experiences were gathered from the participating farmer families. It became obvious that the approach had been successful in several ways; food security on a household level was improved, due to an increase in production and variation of crops. The farmer families involved also reported stronger interrelationships among the members, brought about by working closely together and sharing with each other. It became clear that this approach did not only have the potential to improve food security and income for the families involved, but also build up human and social capital in the groups, and strengthen their organisational capacities (Organic Denmark 2011). The knowledge gained throughout this first project, paved the way for an extension of the approach in several other projects in the following years. One woman explains how the FFLG approach has influenced her life:

“I also learnt new ideas from other members, which I did not know; like making kitchen gardens and how to space and manage these gardens. So now I have additional food for the family like dodo, lettuce, Sukuma Wiki and cabbage. I now get more income from my farming activities, I get some and save with the group and the money grows and I am able to pay for my children’s school fees”

(Female member of an FFLG in Kabarole District, SATNET2 External Evaluation Report, 2014)

1.2 Developing the Concept

From 2009 to 2016, the use of FFLGs has been the central approach used in 6 projects in Uganda, implemented together with the partner organisations NOGAMU and SATNET¹. To date, it is estimated that more than 300 FFLGs exist throughout the Western, Central and Eastern regions of Uganda². Many of these groups are now mature enough to begin collective marketing together, and have developed into market associations who sell their produce on the local and regional markets, providing additional incomes for the farmer families. In 2013, the FFLG approach was extended further, when the first project in Zanzibar, Tanzania, was begun. During the first project, more than 25 FFLGs were formed and began training in organic agriculture. A second project is now being implemented, with the aim of doubling the amount of farmer groups and further develop them to become ready for collective marketing. During the years, the importance of combining household food production with income generating activities such as marketing became evident to the partner organisations. But experiences from the previous projects showed that in order to develop into sustainable market associations, the groups needed additional training in group management, record keeping and marketing, which then became a focus area in the later projects, together with developing the local market linkages and value chains.

In the summer of 2016, Organic Denmark applied for a Partnership Intervention together with The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) in Bhutan. The aim of this partnership is to develop the organisational capacity of RSPN and facilitate the development of agro-ecological agriculture and food systems in the country. Inspired by the FFLG approach, this project will develop a model for organising farmer groups and agricultural training in the local communities. With this project, the FFLG approach now spreads beyond East Africa into Asia and will hopefully be as successful there as it has proven to be in an African context.

Today, the FFLG approach is widespread and is being used by many families across Uganda and Tanzania, Table 2 shows the number of FFLGs, facilitators and involved households in the ECOSAF2 project by September 2016. This table does not include the number of FFLGs and facilitators in the other projects, which means that the actual amount is even higher than shown here.

Implementing Organization	External Facilitators	FFLGs	Households
Caritas Campala	20	49	980
Sulma Foods Ltd.	14	30	834
Africa 2000 Network	18	60	1500
URDT	24	64	1280

(Source: Project Management Committee meeting, 2016)

2.0 Methodology: Data Collection and Research

In order to write this synthesis, knowledge and experiences was gathered from a range of different sources, then sorted and analysed. First of all, desk research was conducted, reviewing all relevant FFLG

¹ The 6 projects in Uganda are FFS1, SATNET1, SATNET2, SATNET3 (still in implementation), ECOSAF1 and ECOSAF2 (still in implementation)

² Source: Final External Evaluation SATNET2, External Evaluation Report ECOSAF1 and Final Evaluation Report ZanzibarFFLG1

documents, such as project proposals, external evaluations and final reports. Based on the information gained through this research, an interview guide was created, containing 16 questions about the use and implementation of the approach³. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected through 8 interviews with key informants who have all worked with the FFLG approach for several years, and represents all relevant stakeholders⁴. The informants include FFLG Officers, Project Managers, External Facilitators and other staff from both Organic Denmark and 8 different partner organisations, MOs and IOs⁵. The interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes. They were conducted as semi-structured interviews, where the interview guide formed the basis for the questions, but left room for further inquiries into relevant subjects which might emerge during the interview. In addition to these interviews, written answers were collected from 3 informants, who were not able to do an interview over the phone or provided additional answers after the interview had been conducted. All information in this report comes from the collected data and researched documents.

As a last part of the data collection, research was done on relevant learning theories and concepts. The relevant theories were selected in collaboration with Per Rasmussen, and an extensive literature review was done, providing an overview of existing research on the subjects and on the main points within each theory. These theories were then used to analyse the collected qualitative data, in order to determine the effects and best practices of using the FFLG approach as an extension approach to improve livelihoods and agricultural practices. By using these learning theories, it was possible to analyse the effects of using this kind of organisational and participatory approach to learning and development, and determine both the effects of this and the measures necessary to assure a successful implementation.

3.0 Lessons Learnt: Experiences, Knowledge and Best Practices

3.1 Results of the FFLG Projects

Using the FFLG approach to spread knowledge about organic agriculture and improve livelihoods for farmer families have brought remarkable results during the first 8 years of implementation. The approach has helped realise the goals of improving family food security and household incomes which was the initial objective of the projects. But it has brought changes that reaches far beyond that. In this section, the results and effects this approach have had on the families and their communities will be presented, together with the effects on local organizations working in agricultural extension.

Food Security

Throughout Uganda and Tanzania, the families involved with the FFLG projects have experienced increased food security as a result of their involvement in the groups. This development is due to a number of improvements in their agricultural practices, which have resulted in fewer months during the year with food shortages, higher yields per acre and a bigger variety of crops grown for home consumption. The term food security covers four different areas; the *availability* of food, the *access* to the

³ See Annex II for the Interview Guide

⁴ See Appendix I for a list of interviews

⁵ In addition to Organic Denmark, the following organization contributed to this report: SATNET, NOGAMU, Sulma Foods, Africa 2000 Network, Caritas Kampala, URDT, UWAMWIMA and TOAM

food available, the *utilization* of food and the *stability* of the other three dimensions.⁶ The families involved with the FFLG projects have experienced improvements in all four categories. When it comes to the availability of food, there has been an increase in yield sizes on the same amount of cultivated land, which means that there is a greater amount of food available to the families. There are examples of farmers who have more than doubled their yields. Because the crops are grown locally, by the families themselves, the access is also improved, contrary to situations where families must travel long distances to purchase food at local markets or stores. Better food utilization refers to the nutritional qualities of the food that is being consumed. Many families are now growing more different kinds of crops than before, which means that their food is more varied than earlier. Even though some families are still experiencing months of food shortage, the number is smaller than before project implementation, this contributes to a better stability of both availability, access and utilization.

When asked about the changes they had experienced after being a part of the FFLG project, farmers in Zanzibar explained that crops under organic farming is better than under conventional agriculture, in terms of both production per plant, quality of products, physical appearance, size and weight⁷.

This improvement in food security among the farmer families is a result of many smaller developments in their agricultural practices. Before becoming part of the FFLG groups, many people did not grow a lot of food for household consumption, but concentrated on crops to be sold to the local market. They have learned to construct small vegetable gardens near the houses, where a wide variety of vegetables are grown, which contributes a great deal to their nutritional health and the amount of food available throughout the year.

New Agricultural Techniques

Pests and diseases poses a big problem to the farmers, damaging or even destroying their crops. If the crops are not completely destroyed by the pests, the quality will be significantly affected. The farmers have learned how to manage these pests and diseases, using organic methods of pest control. Techniques such as intercropping, crop rotation and the making of plant teas out of medicinal plants and herbs to be sprayed on the crops is being used to manage the pests. As a result of this, together with improvements in soil fertility practices, the farmers can now expect a more stable supply of high quality fruits, vegetables and grains. One member of an FFLG group in Zanzibar explains:

“Before starting to work with the project we had despaired that sandy, loamy soils were not productive for crop production, but after getting training and being told to add lime and farm yard manure to sandy soils, it worked wonders. I am now growing vegetables such as beet roots, onions, tomato and amaranthus and I harvest good produce”

(FFLG member in Mkoani District, Zanzibar, Final evaluation report, Zanzibar FFLG)

One of the most important new practices adopted by the farmers, is reported to be soil fertility management. Through techniques such as crop rotation, intercropping, mulching, planting of nitrogen fixing plants and use of compost manure, the farmers can improve the fertility of their soil, which again

⁶ An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security, FAO Food Security Programme, 2008

⁷ Final Evaluation Report, ZanzibarFFLG1

helps them to get higher yields, better crops and reduces the risks of diseases. As a result of all of these improvements, the farmers can not only feed their families more and better food, many also have excess produce which they can sell and thereby earn an extra income for themselves and their families.

New Agricultural Techniques Learned by the Farmers

- **Intercropping**
- **Use of animal, compost and farmhouse manure**
- **Mulching**
- **Water management; digging trenches, constructing water catchments**
- **Pest and disease control; intercropping, herbal teas, bio-pesticides**
- **Using bio-fertilizers**
- **Soil fertility management: Mulching, planting nitrogen fixing plants**
- **Farm planning and management**

Advocacy

As noted earlier, improvement in food security is not the only change brought about by these projects. Several of the informants tell stories about improvements in village and community infrastructure and in hygiene and sanitation. Some groups have helped build pit latrines and installations for hand washing for all the members and others in the village. Some communities have improved their infrastructure by getting electricity to the entire village, building new access roads and improving the existing road network, digging water irrigation channels and digging new boreholes, giving them access to safe and clean drinking water. These improvements are in large part due to an increased awareness among the group members about how to address local authorities in advocacy issues. The members also learn how effective it is to address advocacy issues together; instead of being one person trying to get the attention of local officials, they can now address them as a group of 20-30 people which gives them much more power. Many people have gotten a new perspective on their own development, as one informant states:

“Many people did not know that they had to play an active role in changing their communities, in advocating [...] some of them have learned how to identify advocacy issues, to profile them and to identify the correct personnel level where this should be addressed, to follow them up and how to profile the achievements”

(Informant 1, Interview from October 2016)

By working together as a group and raising these issues with the local authorities, the FFLG groups have reached great accomplishments, which benefits the entire community. The members develop the skills

needed to do so, through the way they work with the FFLG approach; they improve their communication- and public speaking skills, learn how to research and document the issues they have identified and are able to accomplish greater things when acting together as a group than when acting on their own.



A NEW BOREHOLE DONATED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT HAS PROVIDED THIS VILLAGE WITH SAFE, CLEAN DRINKING WATER. THE LOCAL FFLG IS WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD IT

Social Life

The way the groups work together to identify and solve problems in the FFLG approach has contributed to changes in the social life of the villages, and the way people interact. One informant tells that most households used to work as individual families, not very mindful of their social aspects as a wider community, but this has changed now. People in the villages are now sharing with each other. They not only share their knowledge of good agricultural techniques, but also things like planting materials, workforce and other resources. The approach has helped build

cohesiveness, teamwork and a feeling of togetherness and belonging among group members. And they now face challenges together as a team and work together to solve them. In many instances, the knowledge and skills a farmer lacks in order to improve his farming, already exist within the local community, and is now available to him through the network in the FFLG groups. These changes in peoples' social behaviour and feelings can be seen in very concrete ways in the villages. When someone faces a challenge, such as the death of a family member, the other members of the FFLG group will help them through, contributing money for the funeral and helping organize it, bringing food and supporting the family through this hard time. If someone needs help and support, the group is there, and when someone has a celebration, the group is there to participate.

Households

The FFLG approach encourages whole families to be members of the groups, which means that not only the men benefit from it. Women and children are gaining new knowledge and skills and they become active players in supplying the family with good, nutritious food and additional incomes. The children bring this knowledge with them to school, and spreads it to their classmates, by teaching them about organic agriculture and the FFLG approach. This new knowledge creates opportunities for the youth and a great potential for job creation in the future. One informant explains how, in the past, doing agricultural work was seen as a punishment, as it was being used as such when a child had committed an offence. But now, the children realise the value of their new knowledge and skills, and agricultural work is no longer viewed in a negative way. The involvement of the entire family has also benefitted the women,

who gain new knowledge and skills and can contribute more to the food security and raised income in their families.

Several informants report that the whole-family approach to development has improved the social life within the households. The relationship between husbands and wives has improved and there has even been a decrease in domestic violence cases. This improvement is directly connected to the FFLGs where the husband and wife work alongside each other in problem-solving and might even get training on



THE FFLG APPROACH ENCOURAGES THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE ENTIRE FAMILY; MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE THE FAMILY FARM

conflict management. They bring this knowledge with them home, and are able to solve their marital problems together, in a non-violent way. In some instances, the other group members have interfered in marital conflicts, speaking up for the woman and supporting her until they were all able to find a solution together, and prevent the wife from being sent away from her family. The work and effort the members invest in working in the groups means that they are all a part of the development, and have a right to stay and share the benefits of their contributions. They are part of a community, and cannot just be cast away.

3.2 The Work of the Local Organizations

The FFLG approach has eased the workload in some of the local organizations, working with facilitation and training of the farmer groups. Because the farmer families are now organized in groups, extension staff no longer have to visit each single farmer to give advice and training, but can address a whole group at once. Previously, the extension staff had to travel long distances and cover a very large area, this workload has become smaller now, when they have fewer visits. The farmers in the FFLGs are teaching each other, sharing the knowledge that already exist in the group, whereas before, each one of them might call on the extension staff to teach them about a certain crop. Now they all get that knowledge at once, and the local extension workers and external facilitators are only involved when there is a need for their services and guidance.

Working closely with the groups and having good channels of communication between the farmer and the organizations improves their working relationship with local businesses and traders. When there is a need for a product, the organization can get it very fast and easy which creates good relationships with buyers. If the group is well functioning, they can provide a steady and high quality supply to the local traders. In addition to these improvements, the approach has also helped spread knowledge about the

organizations in the local community. People now know it well, they know what kind of work they do, the services they provide and who they are.

3.3 Implementing the FFLG Approach: Key Elements

During the interviews conducted before writing this report, the informants was asked about the most important new knowledge the groups gained from working with the FFLG approach, about what elements are important during the implementation and the potential challenges for the groups. Based on the information from these interviews and the findings of the evaluation reports, it was possible to identify some key elements, which should be present in the groups in order to make sure that they are well-functioning and successful in achieving their goals. The following section presents these key elements, which all help the values and underlying principles of the FFLG approach to be present within the groups. The information gathered from interviews and evaluations show, that if the groups work determinedly with each of these elements, they are very likely to realise the values of respect, trust, equality, common learning, ownership and commitment, which the approach is founded on.

Rotational Visits

The rotational visits constitute the fundamental working method in this approach. During these visits, the farmers gain insight into other farming systems than their own, giving them broad knowledge of different crops and techniques. The informants emphasised that, contrary to knowledge gained at a demonstration farm, the farmers can easily take the new knowledge with them home and start implementing it on their own farm, because they always learn new things based on their own situations and needs. This is due to the fact that, when a farmer is hosting a rotational visit, he gets concrete advice, relating to his specific challenges, which makes it easy for him to begin implementing and working towards improvements.

The rotational visits also serve another important purpose in the groups. Building trust among the members is crucial to the functioning of the group, and opening up your own home to visitors, inviting them to comment, critique and take part in the work done on the farm helps build this trust, according to the informants. Besides this, the rotational visits help the farmers realise the benefits of working together, and thereby builds teamwork and makes the members be more committed to the groups work. One informants explain about the benefits of sharing labour and working together during the visits:

“[There are] benefits that come from the cooperation between individuals and groups, by working together, helping each other and sharing, they all benefit through this approach [...] [It is the] Purpose of Common Gain: one plus one equals more than two. This is what is happening now in the groups, through rotational visits, group members can achieve unexpected results”

(Informant 10, written response from October 2016)

Farm Planning

According to several informants and reports, creating a farm plan can be a very useful tool when working with developing ones' farm. The farm plan gives a good overview of the entire farm, allowing the farmer to identify its needs and potentials. It can then be used as a tool for discussion in the groups about how to develop the farm in the future⁸. However, experiences shows that it can be difficult for the facilitators and farmers to learn this tool, either because they do not understand its purpose or because it is a new and different way of working for the, too visualise the farm in this way.

Building Trust

Building trust between the group members was mentioned as one of the most important elements of a well-functioning FFLG by many of the informants. If the members do not trust each other, they cannot work properly together, they will not entrust others to handle their money and they cannot communicate constructively and openly with each other. Without this the group simply cannot function properly. Building trust does not necessarily happen by itself but might require much time and effort. Sometimes, the way the groups work, visiting each other and depending on others for workforce, knowledge and help will help build this trust. But it is a good idea to include training and exercises on communication and conflict management as well. When asked what is most important within the groups, in order for them to function well and work together, one informant talks about trust:

“One thing they have to learn is building trust among themselves, because these are different people who come from different places and different families, and it is very hard to work together. So they have to have that trust, and it is being built among them”

(Informant 8, Interview from November 2016)

Trusting each other will also help the groups in the future, if they begin marketing their produce together. There is money involved when the groups do joint marketing, and it requires trust to allow others to handle your hard earned money, as another informant explains:



AN EXAMPLE OF A FARM PLAN SHOWING ALL THE DIFFERENT CROPS BEING PRODUCED THERE

⁸ Farmer Family Learning Groups for Community Development, Vaarst et al. 2011

“We have had a few cases where you see there are issues of mistrust, where members don’t feel they can fully trust their leader in certain positions with their money [...] You know, trust is something that builds over time”

(Informant 1, Interview from October 2016)

From the interviews and evaluations, it is clear that there is not one specific way to build this trust. But the informants emphasize the importance of working together as a team and the sharing of knowledge as very important factors. Also, it takes time to build trust, therefore, it is important that the groups are mature and has some years of experience in working with each other, before they begin to carry out difficult tasks such as collective marketing.

Savings and Credit Schemes

Especially when talking about collective marketing, the informants identified Savings and Credit schemes as one of the most important tools which the groups should master, before being ready to market their produce together. The informants said that a good savings and credit scheme had several positive effects; By implementing Savings and Credit Schemes in the group, household finances are improved and funds are saved for future needs. This allows the members to be able to access help in emergencies, such as the death of a family member, as they will either have saved up money for the funeral, or be able to borrow it from the group. By saving up money together, many groups have been able to invest in things like new tools, storage buildings, seeds and value adding technologies such as mills or other machines. By having a Savings and Credit Scheme, the members are dependent on each other’s involvement in the group, wherefore it improves member accountability and involvement and also the sustainability of the group.

Continuous Training of Facilitators and Facilitator Network

From the data collected for this report, it was evident that ensuring facilitator involvement over time and that they keep developing new skills is crucial; this can be done by conducting regular refresher courses, exchange visits and setting up facilitator networks, as one informant explains:

“So now we have a network of facilitators. So in this network they sit monthly to deliberate on the different issues they are going to work up on and its like a planning and also a review platform. So they review their past activities, but also plan ahead for the subsequent month”

(Informant 8, Interview from November 2016)

The networks should not be too big, as this will make it challenging for them to meet, but must have a certain amount of members, making sure that there is new knowledge and help available there. Through this network, the facilitators can meet each other and exchange experiences, help each other with challenges and get inspiration from the other’s groups.

Record Keeping

All informants identify record keeping as one of the most important tools which the groups have to learn, especially if they want to do collective marketing of their produce. But record keeping is also recommended on a farm-level. Keeping records of everything the farm/group produces, the amounts of produce, how much they are sold for and what the family/group spends money on gives an overview of the production and allows for long term planning and management. The simplest forms of records may contain only the family/group incomes and expenditures giving an overview of their cash flow, while the

more complicated can list things like the cost of hired labour, farm investments, sales incomes and expenditures for each crop and time spend on the crops. The records can be used when the groups and families discuss plans for the future; where to invest, what crops to focus on etc. In some families and groups there might be members who are unable to keep records because of illiteracy, but there are ways of developing record keeping methods for those members as well. The groups can then set as a goal, to develop the skills of all members, so that they are able to keep more complicated records in the future.

It is also a good idea to keep records of group activity and organisation. Simple records showing when and where the groups have met and who was present, and how the group is organized at any time will allow the group to keep track of their history and activities together.



RECORD KEEPING CAN ALSO BE DONE USING SYMBOLS AND DRAWINGS, IF SOME GROUP MEMBERS ARE ILLITERATE

Practical Improvements

There might be a need for practical improvements in the groups, in order to ease their work and help improve their production. Creating seed banks and nurseries for new seedlings is a way of securing the sustainability of the farms and ensures that the farmers will not be forced to spend their money on new seeds and seedlings every season. It might also be necessary to invest in building common storage units for the group members, as many might not have a proper place to store the harvest at home. When storing the produce together, the group can ensure a high quality of the entire bulk of products, instead of risking great varieties in quality. One of the informants talks about why a proper storage facility is important:

“[So most of the members were marketing beans and maize and] if they didn’t have the storage facility within the villages, they all agreed to keep it at their own space, like some of them keep 500 kilograms, others keep 200 kilograms within their own houses [...] Then in the process of looking for the market, by the time they come back to look at the maize that they are going to sell, the challenge was the quality wasn’t the best for the market. So now, the only loophole is the storage facility, which is not in place, which will give us the assurance of the quality of the product”

(Informant 2, Interview from October 2016)

Other practical improvements such as tools, teaching materials and chairs and whiteboard for teaching situations might also be needed.

Sustainability

If the FFLG is going to continue working in the long run, some sustainability measures should be present in the group. Things such as implementing a Savings and Credit Scheme and building trust have already been mentioned, but there are other important measures. One informant talks about how there should be a visionary approach present in the group, where it becomes part of the way they work to formulate long term goals and visions, evaluating these regularly and then setting new goals when needed. According to the informant, this allows the groups to see their own progress and strive to move forward at all times. In addition to this, it is important that the internal facilitator is trained well so that he/she is able to take over once the external facilitator is no longer working with the group.

The groups should also be connected to a local organization, so that they can achieve guidance and help at all times, and benefit from the knowledge and contacts within the organization. Some groups choose to work towards doing collective marketing, selling their produce together. Marketing together can serve as a sustainability measure, as it provides the members with valuable, concrete benefits in the form of additional incomes, which will ensure their commitment to working with the group.

3.4 The Process of Becoming a Marketing Association

Farming is not only a way of providing the family with food, it is also a business. Many groups have a desire to sell their produce and earn an income for their families. By doing collective marketing, perhaps developing into a marketing association, the group members bulk their products together and can sell a bigger amount and bargain for a higher price. But looking at the information gathered for this report, it becomes clear that collective marketing does not always work out well, as some groups lack the necessary skills and knowledge to run successful agricultural businesses. This section will provide a list of the most important skills and knowledge which should be present in the group if they want to market their products together, based on the experiences from evaluation reports and informants. The informants all agree that there is a risk that the groups might fall apart and fail in marketing their produce, if they are not properly prepared and has the necessary skills described below.

Group Organization and Dynamics

First of all, the groups must be well organized. They should have a constitution, regulations and a memorandum of association. This will specify from the offset how they want to work, how they will share the profit from the sales and what the plan is if there are any dividends. A well-organized group who wishes to do cooperative marketing must also have a well-functioning leadership. Perhaps they choose to elect a marketing committee who will be responsible for everything related to marketing. The leader of the group and the members of the marketing committee must be someone that people trust to handle their money and produce and who they trust to take the right decisions on behalf of the group, someone who can handle responsibility and is respected within the group.

As mentioned earlier in this report, building up group trust is crucial. This is no less important when it comes to doing collective marketing. Trusting other people to handle large quantities of your harvest and your money is part of this, which means that the group trust and respect must be present before starting to market together. It takes time to build up the necessary trust, and if a group begins to market too early, before the trust and other necessary skills and knowledge is present, the marketing might very well be unsuccessful.

Developing the Enterprise

The informants were asked about the process which the groups need to go through, before being ready to do collective marketing. They described how the groups work with identify crops they want to sell, consider value addition and look for potential markets. According to the informants, the necessary steps in this process are the following; the groups should work together to identify their common objective when it comes to marketing, and work towards achieving this. To begin with they select a main product(s) that they want to focus on; look at the quality of the product and how this might be improved by investing in better post-harvest handling or value adding technologies. They must consider if it is realistic or possible to add value to the products by investing in for example a mill, so that they can sell maize flour instead of grains.

They then identify the expected quantity they can bulk together to sell based on the amount of land available and information from previous years, available to them in their records. The next step is to research the local market; start looking for potential buyers and contact them to begin negotiations.

Skills and Knowledge

The group members must master certain skills and knowledge in order for collective marketing to be successful. They must have good record keeping and management. In addition to this, they should be trained in bargaining skills and in communication between buyer and seller. They also need knowledge about doing business, about the local market and the prices of different products.

Practical arrangements

Building a common storage facility can be a good investment for the groups. If the produce is kept individually by each farmer, the quality might be very varied by the time they are ready to sell, which will influence price and ability to sell. A storage facility ensures good quality in the entire harvest and allows the farmers to save it for when the market demand and prices are higher. It is also worth considering to advocate with the local authorities for improvements in the road network. If the village is difficult to access for the local buyers, they might charge higher prices, or the farmers will have to spend valuable time and money on transporting their products to the town. One informant talks about this challenge:



ONE FFLG HAS INVESTED IN A MAIZE MILLING MACHINE, WHICH ALLOWS THEM TO ADD VALUE TO THEIR PRODUCTS AND SELL MAIZE FLOUR INSTEAD OF GRAIN

“In one group they had a challenge; they didn’t have a connection with a road, there was a valley through which they had to go and they had been selling their maize at a pretty low price, because whoever came to buy had to hire men to take the maize across that valley. But because of the FFLG approach, they learned that they could work together to solve a problem.”

The group approached the sub county officials and advocated for materials and support to build a road to the village, and was successful in their effort and improve the access to the village, the informant goes on to explain:

“[now] lorries could access their area and they could bargain for a better price”

Based on the experiences of the informant, several things can go wrong when the group begins the work of marketing their produce together. But there are many benefits for the group members if the marketing is successful, which is most likely to happen if they are aware of the elements described above and the most common reasons for failure, as shown in table 4.

Reasons for Failure in Joint Marketing:

- **Having produced a product where demand on the market is not high: supply/demand relations are disorganized**
- **Issues with trust within the group**
- **Issues with leadership; lack of transparency, trust or respect**
- **Poor access from the village to the market and buyers**
- **Poor quality of product: usually caused by inappropriate post-harvest handling or lack of storage facilities**
- **Poor recordkeeping or group management**
- **Selling the products right away instead of waiting for beneficial fluctuations in the market: usually caused by lack of knowledge about the local market**

Table 4 (Source: interviews 1-11, 2016)

3.5 Challenges in the Future

Lack of Knowledge about Organic Agriculture

Although there have been great improvements among the communities involved with this approach, they still face many challenges and there is room for improvement in several areas. All external facilitators receive training courses on organic agriculture, but several informants and reports still find that there is a lack of knowledge about good, organic agricultural techniques among the facilitators. Some have noted that the teaching materials should be updated, and perhaps translated into local languages to avoid any knowledge getting lost because of language barriers. Others have suggested that the facilitators must receive regular refresher courses, to assure that they keep learning and keep their knowledge updated. Related to this, is the problem of contradicting ideologies among the agricultural extension staff in some

areas. The facilitators work alongside other agriculture extension staff, who does not have the same knowledge, and are therefore unable to advise the local farmers on organic practices. At the same time, some of the agriculture extension staff members are handing out free chemicals such as pesticides, which contradicts the organic practices which the farmers are trying to adopt.

Marketing

When it comes to marketing, many FFLGs still lack some important skills and knowledge necessary for them to begin joint marketing. Generally, there is a lack of knowledge about collective marketing, and about the developments and prices of the local markets where their produce might be sold. In addition to this, many groups have inefficient record keeping or does not keep records at all. Record keeping has been identified by several informants as a crucial element when it comes to developing into a marketing association, and further attention on these skills is needed in the future. A third challenge when it comes to marketing, is the issue of ill-functioning savings and credit schemes. If the members do not trust each other or their leader with handling their money, some might not contribute equally to the savings. Others might take advantage of the system, wanting more for themselves than the other members. Mistrust and individualism is believed to be a general problem among some groups, which together with negative attitudes and a lack of commitment to the group will make marketing difficult.

Some informants also note that there is a lack of support from the local MOs in linking the groups to the local market, making it difficult for them to dispose of their products. Most of these issues can be altered by increased focus on training in marketing skills and by being aware of each step of the process necessary to go through, before a group is ready to begin marketing. If there has not been sufficient build-up of trust and commitment, and if mechanisms such as savings and credit schemes are not functioning properly, collective marketing might prove unsuccessful.

Climate Change

A third theme when it comes to future challenges is climate change, which is being identified as one of the biggest challenges by all informants. The changes in the local climates causes unstable weather patterns with rainfall at unusual times and prolonged drought. This, off course, is a challenge to both conventional and organic farmers, but the organic practices adopted by the FFLG groups is believed to have a positive effect and to be better at mitigating the consequences of climate change. Specifically soil fertility management is identified as one of the most important skills when it comes to overcoming these consequences.



A MULCHED PINEAPPLE FIELD. THE MULCHING IMPROVES SOIL FERTILITY AND HELPS PRESERVE MOISTURE IN THE SOIL

National Organic Policy

The lack of a national policy on organic farming in Uganda is also a great challenge. Even though advocacy work has been carried out by the Ugandan partner organizations, organic agriculture is still not a part of the national agricultural policy. There have been improvements during the last years and a Draft

Uganda Organic Agriculture Policy has been created but not yet passed in government. Informants predict that a national policy on the subject will ease some of the challenges facing the organic farmers. For example, at the moment there is no means of compensation, if an organic field is contaminated with chemical pesticides from a neighbouring conventional field. This is a big problem for organic farmers, who might lose part of their income, as organic products can be sold to higher prices than conventional ones, on the market. With a national policy enforcing the use of buffer zones between the fields and offering compensation for damaged crops, these challenges would be overcome. The lack of a national policy on the subject also means that all government programmes, such as National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS) and many NGOs promote conventional farming, making it more difficult for organic farming practices to spread. This is also related to the challenges of getting advice on organic farming from local extension staff, as mentioned earlier. Because of this, several local organizations advocate for the government to adopt the FFLG approach as one of their extension services, which would secure better training and help for the organic farmers.

4.0 Theory

The next couple of pages will present some of the most important learning theories which can be used in the analysis of the FFLG approach. All these theories can help deepen the understanding of the approach, by presenting some of the underlying theoretical perspectives. The theories presented here are only some of the learning theories which can be used to describe the FFLG approach, but they have been chosen as they describe some of the most crucial elements of this type of learning environment and practices.

4.1 Critical Pedagogy

- Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher and is broadly recognized as one of the most influential thinkers in his field in the 20th Century. He is one of the first advocates of Critical Pedagogy, as set out in his book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” from 1968. Freire connects learning to social change, saying that education is a crucial element in the process of changing existing conditions of oppression and creating a transformation to a more free and democratic society. He criticizes the predominant form of education calling it “banking education”. According to Freire, Banking Education is fundamentally oppressive and sustains exploitative forms of organization in a society. In this type of learning, the teacher is seen as being the knowledgeable one, simply depositing facts into the mind of the student, indoctrinating them to accept and adapt to the world as it is. Banking education does not foster innovative or creative thinking, but attempts to control people's thinking and actions⁹.

Freire believed that in order to transform the society into a free and substantive democracy, education must change. He advocated a type of learning based on innovative ideas, critical thinking and dialogue. In Critical Pedagogy, information is not simply deposited in the mind of the passive learner, instead the learner is a problem poser, an active and informed participant becoming aware of the world in which he or she lives. Here, the teacher becomes a facilitator and the traditional class a cultural circle. A dialogical relationship between teacher and student is important, fostering constant interaction between them in a

⁹ The Legacy of Paulo Freire: A critical Review of his Contributions, Schugurensky, 1988

process of critical analysis, problem posing and innovative, creative thinking. Through this type of education, the student gains a critical consciousness and becomes aware of the structures and forces that have ruled their lives and shaped the world around them. The students gain the knowledge, skills and social relations that enable them to become engaged citizens, transforming the world and their own lives.



AN EXTERNAL FACILITATOR IS FACILITATING THE TRAINING OF PEST AND DISEASE MANAGEMENT IN MANGOES USING ORGANIC PESTICIDES

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, Paulo Freire's theories appealed to aid-workers, academics and educators across the world. The term "empowerment" gained recognition and was seen as a new way of thinking about development work. Empowering poor and oppressed people to take action, enhancing their capacities to engage in democratic processes and change the institutions of the society, slowly became the goal of international development. In the 1990s the term was broadly accepted in the development world and was incorporated in the UN

Millennium Development Goals at the end of the century. At the time when the term first drew the attention of aid workers and international NGOs there was a growing critique of the technology transfer, top-down approach and asymmetric decision-making which had until then characterized development work. With the emphasis on Empowerment and Participation new ideas started to form, focusing on "bottom up" approaches, improvement of political decision-making, securing peoples access to power and resources, all anchored in the local space and context. The concept has met some critique during the years, stating that it is vague, lacking a clear definition and has become fashionable and is practically impossible to implement in the field. However, the ideas behind it and the focus on active participation remains at the core of many development strategies today¹⁰.

4.2 Peer Learning or Collaborative learning

The concept of Peer Learning has a long history that spreads beyond academic work on education, and probably is as old as any form of collaborative or community action. Here, however, we are concerned with deliberate and explicit peer learning, as a learning method.

Keith J. Topping defines Peer Learning as:

"... The acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions" (Topping 2005).

Put simply, Peer Learning is when a group of people help each other to learn, and learning themselves by doing so, both in formal and informal settings. The concept is not a single educational strategy, but refers to a broad range of theories and practices within learning. There are different forms of peer

¹⁰ Revisiting The Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Paulo Freire and Contemporary African Studies, Thomas, 2009

learning, but they all refer to learning as different from the widespread linear way of transmitting knowledge; from teacher to student. Peer Learning refers to the collaboration and the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experiences between participants. Here, learning is not dependant (on the teachings of the teacher) but interdependent and mutual. The roles of teacher and student are not fixed, but either undefined or might shift between different participants during the course of the learning experience¹¹.

There are several advantages of this kind of learning. First of all, this approach is very cost-effective, as participants share existing knowledge and experiences with each other. Secondly, by collaborating and sharing, participants gain social and communication skills which can also be transferred to other areas of their lives. The method also has an affective function, as it improves self-esteem and liking for the other members of the group and for the subject area. These gains might be difficult to measure, but offers considerable added value, compared to tradition methods of teaching.

There are some risks associated with this type of learning, most of which occur if the method is not organised and implemented correctly, but is done in an unstructured and unsystematic way. If participants are not familiar with this type of learning, or do not understand how it works, they might be confused about it and miss out on opportunities to learn and develop new skills. It is important that the process of Peer Learning is facilitated correctly by someone who understands how it works. If the method is practiced without structure and proper implementation, there is a risk of some participants not contributing or falling behind, it can exacerbate status differences or create dysfunctional interactions in the group¹².

For Peer Learning to be successful, certain elements must be present in the group:

Group Norms

The group must agree on how group work should be done, this involves making room for sharing of new ideas, taking risks, disagreeing, but also listening to each other and being open to learning new knowledge and skills. Promoting positive norms in the group can be done through training cooperation and listening skills, training in resolving conflicts and teaching students to appreciate the skills and abilities of others.

Giving and Seeking Help

It is important that participants are good at giving help and advice to others, this involves giving elaborated, comprehensible explanations in a clear and understandable way. It is also crucial that participants are not afraid to seek help when needed, if so, some might withdraw and not participate in the group work anymore. There must be an accepting atmosphere in the group, were needing help with something does not indicate incompetence, but is seen as an opportunity for new learnings.

Participation

All members of a successful group must be committed and willing to participate, share their own knowledge and listen to others. If group members do not participate and contribute actively to the learning in the group, it might fall apart or a few people might be doing all the work while others simply follow along.

¹¹ Trends in Peer Learning, Topping, 2005

¹² Learning with Peers, Blumenfeld et al. 1996

Group Composition

How the group should be composed depends on situation and context. In some contexts, it might be beneficial to have people from similar backgrounds and with similar experiences, while in others, a diverse group is to be preferred. The facilitator must consider which composition will work best in each situation. Studies show, however, that groups with equal numbers of men and women works the best.

If the teacher or facilitator is aware of the risks of Peer Learning and adjusts the approach to fit any given contexts and subject area, this way of learning can be very beneficial to all involved participants, who will gain both academic and social skills from it.

4.3 Communities of Practice and Legitimate Peripheral Participation

- Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger

Communities of Practice

The theory of Communities of Practice and Legitimate Peripheral Participation was first proposed by Etienne Wenger (later Wenger-Trayner) and Jean Lave in their book “Situated Learning” in 1991. They challenged influential assumptions about learning at the time, as being predominantly an individual process, mainly a result of teaching and with a clear beginning and end. Instead, they proposed that learning is a collective, relational and social process, taking place by the participation in everyday life through interaction with other people.

“People learn through co-participation in the shared practices of the “lived-in” world; knowledge production is inseparable from the situated, contextual, social engagement with these practices; and learning is a process of identity formation [...] rather than primarily the acquisition of knowledge” (Omidvar og Kislov 2013)

They introduced the term Communities of Practice (CoP), which is a group of people who share an interest in a certain subject, and come together to share their experiences, learn from each other and develop new ideas. CoPs come in a variety of forms; they can be formal or informal, local or global and so on. There are three crucial elements present in all CoPs;

- 1) The Domain: a CoP is defined by a shared domain of interest, for example agriculture or education. Membership of the group implies a commitment to the domain, and thereby a shared competence which distinguishes members from other people.
- 2) The Community: in order to be a CoP, members must interact with each other, forming a community where they share experiences and information, engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and learn together.
- 3) The Practice: through this interaction, the members develop a shared practice or a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems, ways of being and learning together etc.

The shared practice of the community is developed through a range of different activities, for example problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, reusing assets, building an argument, growing confidence, discussing development, documenting projects, inspirational visits, mapping existing

knowledge and identifying gaps in that knowledge. The fact that they are organizing around some particular area of knowledge and activity gives members a sense of joint enterprise and identity¹³.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

The term Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) refers to the process through which newcomers in a CoP becomes experienced members of the community and gradually gains valuable new skills and knowledge. Through a process of learning, the newcomers start by doing simple, but productive and necessary, tasks. Through these initial activities, they become acquainted with the practices, knowledge, activities, dynamics and relationships of the community, as they learn from the “masters” or “old-timers” of the group, the experienced members with a lot of knowledge and experience. The new members gradually move “inwards” towards full participation, becoming experienced members of the community, who are invaluable to its work and development. Through this process, the members increase their knowledge, competences and involvement in the main processes of the community, and their status shifts to “old-timer”. In this theory, learning happens through a process of social participation, a process which is dynamic and constantly evolving.

The theory of LLP was originally inspired by studies of the Master/Apprentice relationship in traditional apprenticeships where inexperienced apprentices learn from the masters, by participating in and observing their work. From these studies, Lave and Wenger developed the theory, emphasizing the importance of this process of learning.

In CoPs all learning, whether it is by new members through LPP or by older, more experienced members, takes place through social interaction and working together. The commitment of the members is therefore crucial to the sustainability of the group, and it requires that they see the CoP as a priority, but also that they see results of their participation – members must have a sense that they are gaining something from participating. CoPs do not just pass on existing knowledge and spread it among the members. New knowledge and skills are developed through the joint activities of the community.

5.0 Analysis

All three theories explained in the section above can be used to describe the FFLG approach. In this section, the approach will be analyzed further, using the theories. The aim of this analysis is to spread some light on the FFLG approach as a particular way of learning, and thereby contribute to both an increase in agricultural knowledge and a change in the social life and development of the involved villages.

Social change and advocacy

Paulo Freire’s Critical Pedagogy connects learning to social change, and with this connection, identifies learning as a key element in community development and in changing the societal structures which influences peoples’ lives. He claims that, if learning is done correctly, using dialogue, discussion and problem solving, the students will become engaged citizens, involved in changing their lives and societies for the better. Although Freire’s initial thoughts on the subject stems from a colonized society and are quite revolutionary in character, the theory is still relevant today, and describes very well the process which many FFLGs go through. Time and again, informants and reports mention a change in peoples’

¹³ Legitimate Peripheral Participation, Lave & Wenger, 1991 and Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction, Wenger-Traynor, 2015

social behavior as a result of being involved in the FFLG projects. The strong focus on community; working and sharing in unison helps people develop their social relations, skills and knowledge. One informant talks about the changes he has observed in the villages:

Most households used to work as individual families not very mindful of their social aspects as a wider community [...] more households have joined and embraced the approach as it enhances more interactions on village level; some community work, like working on roads by some FFLGs has created more social capital. Where there is a house of elderly people, they have constructed say pit latrines or shades for animals”
(Informant 5, written response from October 2016)

It is clear that the type of learning practiced in the FFLG groups contributes to changes on a societal level, not only when it comes to improved food production, but especially in the way that people view themselves as part of a wider community, and the responsibilities that comes with this role. Many FFLG groups has taken up tasks of helping other members of the village, and by joining together and working as a group they have been able to complete tasks which would have been too much for a single family to take on. The construction of pit latrines and animal shelters are just two examples of some of the tasks they have taken up. Others have helped build or repair houses, construct village roads and provided compensation for farmers who had experienced adversities such as wildfires. When asked about this change in the social life of the villages, informants mention that the FFLG members have improved their communication- and public speaking skills, have gained the capacity to assist the community to overcome challenges, has built teamwork and cohesiveness among members and that they have gained awareness about playing an active role in community development.



A FFLG IS WORKING TOGETHER TO CONSTRUCT A GOAT SHELTER FOR ONE OF THE MEMBERS

These changes are closely connected to advocacy, which is one of the most effective ways of changing the societal structures which influences your life. When the groups are taught how to identify and address advocacy issues with local governments, they can greatly impact the development of the village. One informant talks about teaching the members about advocacy and resource mobilization:

“[And this] knowledge is one of the resources that we encourage them to have. So we find that they are able to write their own agendas, approach the different authorities, like the sub county where there are community driven funds, so they are able to tap into those resources that maybe the project is not providing them”

(Informant 8, Interview from November 2016)

The local governments have noticed the results of the FFLG approach and helped with improvements in local infrastructure. But some FFLG members have also gained influence by being elected to local leadership positions, thereby being directly involved in the decision making process. The informants all contribute these changes to the way the FFLG approach works with active learning, sharing of knowledge

and labour and training in advocacy. Though some groups have gotten very far on the subjects of social change and advocacy, others have not involved themselves with these issues yet. This may be because these groups are quite new and have not yet developed enough to take on these challenges.

Learning Together

The FFLG approach uses Peer Learning methods in every part of the groups work. In this approach, the rotational visits are the basis for both collaboration, communal labour, sharing of knowledge and group work, which are all elements of Peer Learning. As described above, some elements should be present in the groups, in order to secure a successful and well-functioning learning environment. These are group norms, the willingness and skills involved with giving and seeking help, active participation and group composition. Looking at the information gathered for this report, it seems that the groups have been

successful when it comes to embracing this type of learning and making it work in practice. But there are still some challenges when it comes to participation and giving and seeking help. Several informants talk about how people used to work as individuals and not share their knowledge with their neighbours. Because this has been the norm, opening up your farm to others and asking for their help and advice can be difficult for some members. Some farmers might not trust that the others are giving them good advice or they might be unwilling to invite others to see the problems they are



THE MEMBERS OF A FFLG IN ZANZIBAR RECEIVE TRAINING TOGETHER

facing on their farm. But in most instances, the composition of the FFLG approach helps eliminate this problem. Because all farmer families are equal members of the groups who will all host the rotational visits at some point, they know that they will be in the position of receiving advice eventually. This encourages members to be respectful and helpful when they are visiting a farmer and addressing his challenges. When the members start seeing the good results that comes from the groups work, they will be more willing to share and receive knowledge in the future and actively participate in working with the group.

When it comes to peer learning, the part of the facilitator is very important. He/she must not take on the role of a teacher; whose job it is to educate the members, deciding what they should learn and how. The facilitators in the FFLG approach receive training on this subject and in order to make sure that the implementation is successful, they should be familiar with the values and methods of the approach before they go on working with the groups. The informants only report a few instances where facilitators have not been able to embrace this type of learning, most of them says that this approach has made the work of the agricultural advisors and extension workers a lot easier. By acting as facilitators, their workload has considerably decreased and the communication with the farmers has improved.

One of the benefits of using peer learning is that it has an affective function, which means that it builds liking and togetherness among the members. This has been a very clear result of the FFLG approach. The approach has built teamwork, brought togetherness and social cohesiveness and people have formed new friendships as a result of working in the groups.

Evolving as a Community of Practice

FFLG groups can be characterized as Communities of Practice as they have all three elements describing a CoP. The Domain is organic agriculture, the Community exists because members regularly interact with each other through meetings and rotational visits and they share knowledge and labour. The Practice, referring to a shared repertoire of resources, is developed in each group as they work together and create a common pool of knowledge and skills helpful in organic agriculture.

The CoP is developed through the way the members work together. In the FFLG groups, problem solving, identifying gaps in existing knowledge, requesting information, seeking new experience and discussing development are all parts of the groups work. Through this work, the CoP evolves and grows stronger, while at the same time expands their Practice as they add new knowledge and skills to their common repertoire. One informant who has been working with the approach from the beginning, talks about the way the members and facilitators work in the groups:

“It is about a special way of doing it. We sit down with the farmer groups and try to brainstorm, we try to do roleplay, to bring out the issues that are pertinent in their community. So you find that I myself, do not sit down and start teaching them. But it’s from their communities that they realize “Oh, we have this issue and we have this need, so how do we go about it?” – and you find that [...] they even have solutions to these needs. I just facilitate the process of doing this, I don’t teach them”

(Informant 8, Interview from November 2016)

One of the most important elements of the CoP theory and LLP, is that there is not a specific person who acts as a teacher. The position of teacher can shift between the experienced members, who teach the “newcomers”. Learning takes place through a process of social interaction; through being part of and working in the groups. The facilitator plays a crucial role in the development of the FFLG group as a CoP. Because the external facilitator has a lot of knowledge about organic agriculture and about the FFLG approach, he will often take on the role as Master, sharing his knowledge with the other members, who can then move inwards in the CoP, from “newcomers” to “old-timers” or masters. The facilitator helps develop the shared Practice of the group, adding new skills and knowledge to their shared repertoire. Other members can also take on the role as Master, if they have specific knowledge that is useful to the group. In the FFLGs it is the members own knowledge and skills which forms the basis of each group and when they have identified gaps in this knowledge, do they seek out additional learning from outside the groups. This then adds their shared repertoire of resources and the group grows stronger.

This way of developing together and continuously adding to the pool of knowledge and skills present within the group describes the process of Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Even though LPP usually refers to one new member joining the group and moving towards full participation, in this instance it can also be used to describe the way a newly formed group develops into an experienced FFLG with vast resources of knowledge about agriculture, advocacy, community involvement and marketing. Each group

is different from other FFLGs, as they themselves defines their goals and needs and develops their shared practice, but they can all be seen as CoPs. What is most important to understand, when talking about LPP is that it is a *process*. No one forms a new FFLG or joins an existing one, knowing everything there is to know. The groups must go through this process of developing their common knowledge and skills, but most importantly, developing the group's way of working together; how they communicate within the group, how they discuss issues, the way they give critique and advice, their routines and rules and the organization of the group. Looking at the data, it becomes clear that it is important to allow the groups the time and effort it takes to develop as a CoP, if they are going to be sustainable. Before taking on tasks that are too complicated or requires a lot of work from the members, such as joint marketing, the groups must have had the time to develop their shared Practice and build the trust and respect necessary to carry out these tasks. The theory of CoP and LPP helps explain this process and the importance of allowing newly formed groups to begin with “simple” tasks and then gradually work towards a more developed group, with lots of shared practices and the capacity to take on more complicated work together.

Ownership and Sustainability

The learning theories used here all identifies ownership as one of the important results of using group-based, participatory learning methods. By involving people in their own learning, basing it on their specific situation and making them responsible for their own progress, these methods makes sure that people take ownership of their own development. This ownership is crucial when it comes to the sustainability of the FFLG approach. One informant talks about the difference between working with farmers before and now:

“[One of the most important things is] ownership of the approach. Because we used to do extension, but I must say we were like donkeys, just carrying the information and talking to the farmers. But this time around the farmers are more or less the extension, they are their own extension officials, they keep on advising them. So they are owning the extension now, which was not the case before.”

(Informant 8, Interview from November 2016)

It is clear that by basing the agricultural learning on the farmers own needs, making his life the basis of development and learning, the farmers are more involved and can easier implement the new knowledge they gain through the FFLG. Working in groups creates a responsibility, not only to your own family but too all the other members in the group, which means that people will work hard to implement the suggested changes on their farms and help the entire group develop. This feeling of responsibility towards the others and the active involvement it brings with it helps to build a sustainable group, who will continue work even though the external facilitation stops.

Conclusion

The use of the Farmer Family Learning Group approach has been successful in many ways. Through improved agro-ecological techniques and knowledge about organic agriculture the farmer families involved with the approach has been able to improve their food security. The farmers have experienced higher yields, better management of pests and diseases, better soil fertility management and a more varied diet of good quality fruits and vegetables. The FFLGs have also brought developments on a social level. Through the group-based, participatory approach, the farmers have learned to take responsibility for their community's development, through advocacy and working together. The approach has built trust, teamwork and community spirit among the members and the surrounding villages.

If the FFLG approach is going to bring about positive results in the communities, the way it is implemented is of the most importance. Certain elements should be present within the groups, which helps secure a successful and sustainable approach. First of all, the core values of respect, trust, equality, common learning, ownership and commitment should be the foundations of every groups work. Secondly, the groups should implement some key elements; Rotational visits, farm planning tools, savings and credit schemes, record keeping and the necessary practical improvements. Thirdly, the continuous training of facilitators is important, as it ensures that they are able to assist the groups through all stages of development with the help and support they need. When properly implemented, the FFLG approach has the potential to build up strong local communities with the ability to feed themselves, work together towards improvements and new goals and advocate local authorities for help and influence.

The success of this approach is without doubt due to its participatory nature, with its point of origin in each individual farmers life and circumstances, and with a strong focus on sharing, communal work and group involvement.

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