

UPSIDE

**Northern Uganda Resilience Initiative (NURI) –
Extension 2023**

NURI

Danida



Pilot Activity report on Farmer Market Schools

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PILOT ACTIVITY REPORT

Pilot Title:	Farmer Market Schools (FMS)
Brief description of pilot	<p>Smallholder farmers need to engage more with the market to increase their income. However, many smallholder farmers have poor mindset & lack knowledge about the market and they are not recognized as important value chain actors. Most farmers focus on the first link of the value chain, lacking skills and confidence to engage beyond the local market or middleman. In some cases, they are frustrated as not even the middlemen buy their products e.g. home-made groundnut paste. This limits their move from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture. Empowering farmers to be aware of other value chain actors will open new opportunities. Farmers need market information and linkages in order to maneuver in and benefit from the wider value chains and develop their farming activities to a business level.</p> <p>The Farmer Market School (FMS) approach, as developed by ADRA and adopted by NURI, aims to empower smallholder farmers, where they, on their own, start to explore the market and learn how it functions, and where it offers them new opportunities or better prices. Farmers understanding of the market is widened through facilitation and discovery learning, motivating them to explore the market. Once a value chain is known with all its links and actors, specifications and peculiarities, the smallholder farmers will be better able to make decisions about which value chains to specialize in and what is expected of them as producers. Furthermore, when the farmers are able to analyze one value chain through this participatory methodology, they can use this same skill to analyze any other relevant value chains. They will also realize the importance of quantity, timeliness and quality. This is the essence of the Farmer Market Schools approach which has 14 topics in its training curriculum.</p> <p>General objective:</p> <p>To build the capacity of the small-scale farmers to engage with different markets for better prices, more control and new opportunities, thus contributing to the NURI overall objective.</p> <p>Specific objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To train and mentor selected farmer groups on FMS methodology 2. To improve farmers ability to market their produce advantageously 3. To monitor and document activities of farmer groups that have been trained in the FMS curriculum. <p>NURI CF led the implementation of the 2 years pilot through its CSA Units and partners; RAU Kitgum/Lamwo, RAU Adjumani, RAU Moyo/Obongi, PICOT, ARUDFA and AFARD spread in the target districts. The Farmer Market School methodology was piloted in all NURI districts as the problem of reliable access to market for farmers produce cuts across all the districts.</p> <p>However, it also received support from DLGs in form of monitoring of the pilot, private sector where the farmer groups carried out market trips to learn or network and ADRA for training NURI staff on the methodology.</p> <p>The activity targeted 181 selected CSA farmer groups in the 13 districts NURI operated. Some of the achievement registered were; groups able to market their produce at prices higher than local prices, many groups established linkages with buyers, input dealers and financial institutions, improvement in household planning, sharing of gender roles among others.</p> <p>Approximately a budget of UGX. 250 million was used to implement the program and this basically covered training of staff and groups, monitoring of the activities, review meetings, development of training materials, exchange visits and support of market trips by staff. The staff costs were not included here.</p>
Brief description of context	<p>Erratic Weather: This was most challenging especially for first season crops. There was prolonged dry spell which affected maize, groundnut, millet, soybeans, vegetables etc that were planted in first season. It resulted in delayed planting, less acreage planted and poor performance of the crops. Some field crops were totally destroyed. Second season rains were generally better although delayed and also had few isolated dry places in the districts of Kitgum, Agago, Nebbi, Arua etc. There was improvement in second season in terms of harvest. The overall effect of poor weather was the yields of most crops were far below most averages, less acreage planted, low total production and quantities for market. Many groups as a result did not achieve their production plans.</p>

	<p>Economic activities: Farming is the main economic activity the community in Northern Uganda is engaged in, However, the poor weather as reported above continues to affect it. There was very little first season harvest and thus little produce for sale. The dry spell led to a spike in the average prices (UGX) of some commodities as follows; Sesame 5,200-6000, beans 3,500- 5500, dry cassava 1300-1500, and soybean 2000-3000. Others were; Onions peaked at 7,000, maize grain 700 - 1,500, Potatoes 1,000 - 2,500, groundnuts shelled 4,000 - 6,000. There was high demand than supply due to failure in first season harvest. On the other hand, it excited the producers who had surplus for sale.</p> <p>Security situation: There was relative peace in Northern Uganda which provided good environment for implementing the pilot. There were however isolated cases of insecurity which did not affect the FMS pilot implementation.</p> <p>Food security situation: Northern Uganda was relatively food secure although there were households that were really stressed due to first season crop failure. In Kitgum and Agago some food relief was provided by OPM. This improved with second season harvest and vegetable production which is often quick. There was generally high demand for grains and pulses as a result of poor harvest.</p> <p>Supportive infrastructure: the road network was fair in most areas thus access to markets was not hindered although became poor with second season rains. Most groups did not have stores for bulking of produce. A few had group or community owned stores.</p> <p>Social events: Within the communities, events such as market days, funerals, marriage parties, etc predominated the social setup affecting implementation of planned activities like trainings, monitoring and field crop activities as the targeted group members took part in these social events. The staff regularly rescheduled activities due to postponements.</p> <p>Access to Financial services: The main source of finance for most groups was from VSLA. Formal financial services tended to be concentrated in urban areas however, the SACCOs, Agent banking and mobile money points are increasingly spreading out. Few groups have been linked to financial institutions for account opening and other services. The Government Parish Development Model (PDM) funds have complimented financial sources for some beneficiaries.</p> <p>Coordination and Collaboration: NURI received good collaboration from ADRA Uganda that trained NURI master trainers and also continued to give guidance whenever needed. The DLGs carried out monitoring of the pilot and provided their feedback. The business community namely input dealers, produce buyers and financial institutions provided NURI staff and groups opportunity to learn and share their information. Some of them have established business linkages with the NURI groups.</p>
<p>Key project successes</p>	<p>Key results include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training groups on FMS methodology: 181 groups were trained on FMS methodology and this has enhanced their knowledge on marketing. They are now more informed about marketing where they seek for market information than before. This is because FMS is grounded on producing what the market wants. 2. Collective marketing: the FMS training was able to reinforce collective marketing by the farmers. Because of the FMS training, many were able to sell their produce collectively and fetched better prices compared to when they sold individually. This has been reported across most districts although volumes are still low. It is also catalysing formation of cooperatives in some locations as it improved collaboration among some groups. 3. Market and other services Linkages: FMS is about farmers taking lead in search for market with their own resources and this has resulted in establishment of market linkages with the buyers. Some like Kimu Home Learning Centre and Lurojo farmer groups in Koboko district got market linkages within their localities while others far. Some groups e.g. Munguleni in Arua have local contracts for supply. During market trips, they have been able to get buyers. The farmers also got exposed to other services they had not experienced before e.g. agro input dealers, financial services, value addition services etc. 4. Construction of produce stores: FMS training has encouraged the groups to store their produce very well and sell from central points. With this task groups like Tabukutoro in Koboko district and Mandanyazu in Terego district were able to construct stores on their own while others are in the process to of doing the same. It has also strengthened use of existing stores and this is cultivating cooperative formation as witnessed in Nebbi, Pakwach and Zombo districts. 5. Improved planning and monitoring: Following FMS training some groups and farmers namely;

	<p>Kimato Ikano farmer group in Agago district changed the enterprises they engaged in and this was informed by the market trips. Also, farmers developed production plans towards collective marketing of the produce. Planning and goal setting at household level has been strengthened. Some farmers testified now monitoring their fields than before and responding to the various operations timely.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Reduced GVB cases: FMS training has different sessions and some such as Household economy and family farm, savings and loans and gender address family matters. Out of this training, there has been improvement in household relations leading to reduced cases of GBV. 7. Increased awareness on quality seeds and produce: FMS training emphasises quality products. Farmers have appreciated importance of quality which starts from seed to the product and many have noted price differences out of quality and have embraced it. Farmers have appreciated simple ways of value addition to produce e.g. cleaning, sorting, drying. Market prospects for quality products is high. 8. Use of farmers as trainers in FMS: The use of 3 Group Marketing Facilitators (GMFs) who are farmers from a group to train their fellow farmers has built capacity within the groups to continue learning on FMS beyond NURI pilot. GMFs took the lead in organizing market trips thus exposing them to market dynamics such as negotiation skills. The use of GMFs to train freed AEOs time to do other things like backstopping. 9. Organisational setup of NURI program: According to ADRA, the setup of NURI implementation arrangement helped it reach that number of groups and provide the training. In NURI, the existing structures namely; GMFs, AEO, AES, CSAC, Unit Heads made FMS to thrive. It also allowed some level of freedom for staff to learn and implement the lessons immediately as field conditions dictated.
<p>Project shortcomings and solutions</p>	<p><u>Few market trips by farmers:</u> FMS expects farmers to make 3 or more market trips to explore the market and identify opportunities offered. Since markets change and new opportunities come, farmers should have periodic market trips. However, most farmer groups had 1 or 2 market trips often at their respective village markets and/or nearest towns. This means little market exploration was done. They gave various reasons such as lack of funds, not being familiar with some places, found the opportunities they were looking for etc. There is need to continue mobilisation of farmers for more market trips. A few that have made it have appreciated what they learnt.</p> <p><u>Low level of collective marketing:</u> FMS thrives with associated collective marketing as it increases the numbers and volumes. Despite the FMS training, some farmers sold individually for different reasons. There is need to continuously encourage the groups to market collectively.</p> <p><u>Low level of production by FMS groups:</u> There is need to increase production so that there is surplus for sale at households and required quantities to attract big buyers. The level of production in most groups is still low. FMS has sessions that motivate farmers to increase production. There is need to continue mobilising farmers to increase production and mindset change.</p> <p><u>Unwillingness of farmers to pay for market trips:</u> Under FMS, the farmers using their own resources should conduct market exploration. However, some group members were not willing to fund this activity. In the end it limits where they can go. Others expect the program to finance such trips and yet farmers are expected to own up this activity by funding it themselves. In some instances, farmers complained that those who went for market trips did not bring exact feedback to the group members. Mindset change, continuous sensitization, providing market trips reports to groups general assemblies are required here.</p> <p><u>Short period to implement FMS pilot:</u> FMS is about behaviour change which requires at least 4 years to see changes but the pilot had been 1 – 2 years which is very short to see desirable results. However, quick evaluation using livelihood self-perception has been done and it shows farmers have appreciated FMS training. For a main program that has FMS component, it requires 4 years to see results.</p> <p><u>Poor quality of training by GMFs:</u> FMS encourages use of farmers in training groups. Training by some GMFs was poor compared to NURI staff. Some even failed to roll the training to their fellow group members or complete it. It was realised that some GMFs cannot handle complex subject matter hence AEOs become handy. It is necessary to provide mentoring and backstopping as well refresher training for GMFs and groups to master the various sessions.</p>

	<p><u>Absenteeism by group members:</u> Many farmers do not attend all the 14 sessions in FMS manual which leaves them half-baked. This is due to farm activities, social events, long period of training etc. It is important to hold training sessions during off farm periods, shorten training periods and re-schedule some trainings to maximise farmers trained.</p> <p><u>Combining many activities:</u> Often FMS training was held on days of VLSA sitting by the groups. Also, some FMS groups had other trainings from other pilots. This took a toll on farmers' time. Amidst busy schedules of farmers, it affected the training of FMS. In future programmes, FMS trainings should be held for a shorter time and have its training stand-alone activity. Staff and groups should also schedule activities well.</p> <p><u>Motivation of GMFs:</u> GMFs trained their groups voluntarily. However, some were demoralised to continue training and missed some trainings. It is necessary to identify ways of motivating the GMFs e.g. through review meetings, provision of in-kind items such as T-shirts, bicycles etc.</p> <p><u>Clustering of groups:</u> clustering of groups would bring big number of groups together however some FMS groups were so scattered that it was not possible. It is important to consider surrounding groups and community and encourage them to be trained or market together with FMS groups. In addition, all FMS groups per district were encouraged to work together.</p>
<p>Lessons learned</p>	<p>Farmers made discovery learning from the market trips: Farmers out of market trips were able to discover certain things they had not known. Some discovered market opportunities within others far, price differences were glaring, other needed services they could get that they did not know. This opened their eyes and mindset on market dynamics. Some changed the enterprises out of the market trips.</p> <p>FMS training boosted collective marketing by farmers: Much as collective marketing was encouraged in the CSA program of NURI, it did not bear much fruit. The FMS training catalysed collective marketing among the groups trained as it had the element of market research for better prices. Collective marketing by some groups has been a precursor for formation of cooperatives e.g. AFARD supported groups in Nebbi, Pakwach and Zombo districts to form cooperatives.</p> <p>Quality products fetched more money and had market: FMS emphasised quality products and farmers were able get better prices and market was available. Some got local contracts for supply. They carried out simple value addition practices such as proper drying, cleaning, sorting, packaging. Some have started processing of their products.</p> <p>Use of farmer trainers (GMFs) and their selection: some farmers appreciated the use of fellow farmers in the training saying they did a commendable job and they will remain to support their groups after NURI closure. The monitoring visits by CF really found they had done a good job. Others did not consider the training by their fellow farmers worthwhile and despised them. The selection of GMFs is key to get desired results.</p> <p>A mix of training methods: FMS used a mix of training methods; plenary discussion and experience sharing, role plays, pictorials, presentation, re-cap, refresher training, exchange visits. Training done by AEOs and GMFs. This was appreciated a cross section of groups interviewed about the training appreciated the approach that NURI employed.</p> <p>FMS requires time to see tangible impact: It is not immediate to see results from FMS training but there are positive milestones that NURI was able to see from the short period of implementation. If nurtured by the groups the impact would be big in a short time.</p> <p>Difficulty in some topics for staff, GMFs and Farmers: Not all can be well with everyone, so in FMS training some topics were hard for farmers, GMFs and AEOs to understand. Such required refresher training, backstopping and mentoring. This also requires simple training materials for AEOs and GMFs. FMS approach should thus also start early in the program.</p> <p>Unfavorable weather: Unfavorable weather is a great hinderance to increased production. This affects expected results from groups.</p> <p>Distance between groups: In some areas, groups and/or farmers are so scattered that it is difficult to cluster them. This affects training them using cluster model, collective marketing and other activities that necessitate joint action. Some farmers are very far from existing stores.</p>

<p>Follow-up Actions</p>	<p>FMS needs more time: FMS needs more time (4 years) to measure the impact. It is early to predict the results of FMS pilot. ADRA works with FMS for 4 years. Any future partners could continue to mentor these groups for extended period or factor this in its planning.</p> <p>Organisational set up: Any future program should have clear organisational set up like NURI for effective delivery of FMS training to the groups. It should have interface of entire staffing structure from top to bottom with the farmers.</p> <p>Program design: FMS should not be a stand-alone program but be integrated in extension program which should be provided to as many groups as possible and be scheduled to commence early. Marketing is a challenging issue affecting farmers.</p> <p>Focus attention on weak areas: These are key areas that need more attention; having few market trips, low level of production, low level of collective marketing, gaps in FMS training including the approach etc. There is need to strengthen these and the FMS groups will thrive. The Sustainability of FMS relies in GMFs so there is need for AEOs to empower GMFs by progressively allowing them take lead in FMS training and other activities. They should work themselves out by divulging some roles to GMFs to empower them. It is important to encourage more market trips and select GMFs according to ability and where necessary drop them. The staff should have skills in agri business.</p> <p>Involvement of DLGs: It was recommended to involve DCOs early for follow up even after phaseout of the project. This was lacking in NURI pilot.</p> <p>Translation of training materials to local languages: There is need to translate the FMS materials NURI developed into local languages so that they are user friendly to farmers.</p> <p>Cost-sharing of market trips: The program should in future consider cost-sharing market trips to encourage more trips by farmers.</p> <p>GMFs quarterly review meetings: It is important to have quarterly review meetings by GMFs as these offer avenues to strengthen them and address field challenges as well as a source of motivation.</p> <p>Conclusion: FMS pilot has been a success with great learning and therefore recommended for inclusion in future programs of Danida. It has generated a lot of enthusiasm from participating groups who have pledged to continue even without NURI, inspired by the training they received. The market trip experiences along with other topics have proved beneficial to the groups and households.</p>
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