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## **The Journey towards Self-financed Farmer Field Schools in East Africa**

*A paper prepared by The East African Sub-regional Pilot Project for Farmer Field  
Schools on Integrated Production and Pest Management for presentation at the  
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*James R. Okoth<sup>1</sup>  
Godrick S. Khisa<sup>2</sup>  
Thomas Julianus<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Has been Project Assistant IPPM FFS Project, Uganda now Programmes Assistant at FAOR - Uganda

<sup>2</sup> Project Assistant IPPM FFS Project, Kenya

<sup>3</sup> Project Assistant IPPM FFS Project, Tanzania

## **Abstract**

In East Africa, Farmer Field Schools are being used to address several sustainable livelihood aspects with integrated production and pest management as the entry point. The effectiveness of the FFSs as a vehicle for achieving the goals hinges on their fiscal sustainability by the communities and local governments. In this regard, the East African Sub-regional Pilot Programme on IPPM FFS has been evolving over the past for years.

Several innovations gearing towards sustainability of the FFSs have been trialblazed. The innovations range from clustering the FFSs through the "foci model", introduction of commercial plots alongside the study plots, the in service training of facilitators using the "zigzag model, grant system where farmer groups receive grants for implementing their FFSs, and establishment of FFS organisational networks.

Currently, as a result of several case studies with alumni FFSs that have shown that the groups are able to recover the whole sum of grant from their commercial plots after two successive growing seasons, the grants system is being transformed into an educational revolving fund culminating into self-financed FFSs. This is already bearing fruit with some local governments committing funds to the FFS.

## Introduction

The East African Sub-Regional Pilot Project for Farmers Field School became operational in mid-1999 in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania with activities based in 8 pilot districts. The overall goal of the project was assess the effectiveness of the FFSs to address poverty issues. The long-term objective was to expand the capacity of governments, NGOs and the private sector to respond to the needs of resource-poor farmers for knowledge and access to information that would enable them to upgrade their farming systems. This would then be achieved through increased competence of extension systems to provide farmer education that responds more effectively to local resources and conditions, establishing a networking capacity for the exchange of FFS experiences within and between countries, and contributing information on the replicability and effectiveness of FFS as an alternative and sustainable mechanism for extension delivery.

Against that background and realising that the effectiveness of the FFSs as a vehicle for achieving the goals hinges on their fiscal sustainability by the communities and local governments, the implementation of the project started with open questions on FFS effectiveness, sustainability and spirit of innovation and examination. As a result, several innovations gearing towards sustainability of the FFSs have been trial blazed and become part of FFS programmes in many other organisations inside and outside the region.

With integrated production and pest management as primary focus, several sustainable livelihood aspects have been incorporated into the curriculum. At the on-set of the FFSs, farmers holistically identify their problems and map out resources available as a basis of selecting the relevant inclusions in the season-long training. Some of the sustainable livelihood issues that have been incorporated over time include HIV/AIDS issues, Reproductive health care, nutrition, gender issues, malaria control, child immunisation, environmental control, basic financial management, simple credit management skills, farming as a business and many more as need arises. This responsiveness to farmers' needs has transformed the FFSs to popular community fora where farmers discuss their problems under the local context and seek local solutions with minimal external influence. This has been a fundamental factor in developing the farmers' confidence to determine their destiny. To date, about 1,000 FFSs have been established in the pilot area with close to 25,000 direct beneficiaries.

A "foci model"<sup>4</sup> was adopted for the establishment of the FFSs. Successive FFSs are established in the immediate neighbourhood to form a cluster. In terms of human capital, this has enhanced the frequency of interaction, sharing and horizontal flow of information among the different groups. As a result, innovations and the rich resources of indigenous knowledge tapped from the remote rural settings can be transferred faster. The model also fosters coordination within the cluster reducing the overall cost of implementation because the different FFSs have bulk purchase of inputs and cost share joint special topics presented by guest speakers.

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<sup>4</sup> Growing from a nucleus outwards

This model has led to the independent development of FFS-Networks at both the sub-county/divisional and district level. The FFS-Networks representatives sit on district boards and are active in developing marketing and other programmes.

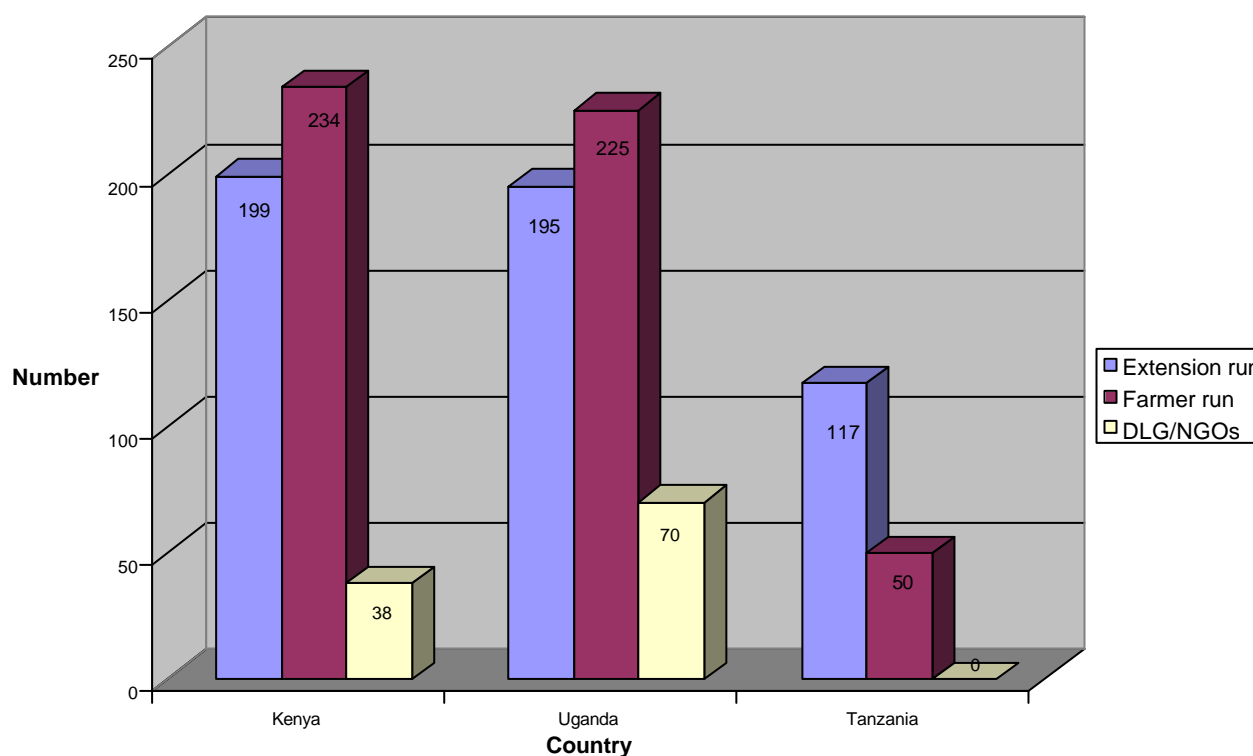
To strengthen the foci model, both the core and farmer facilitators are selected from the community. Involving the farmers in facilitation has increased the ownership of the process. Their motivation coupled with a better understanding of the community makes them more responsive to the farmers needs. While the farmers are increasingly taking on the direct role of facilitation, the extension staff slowly broadening their community development role to linking the groups to services beyond agricultural training. These informal linkages have been significant in holistically addressing the diverse problems for which speciality has to be borrowed from other stakeholders like NGOs, CBOs or even the farmers themselves. Consequently, this change of roles and provision of a "co-ordinated vehicle" in which other players can incorporate their activities has led to the saving of farmers' valuable time. Otherwise the same farmers would be confronted by the different players at different times with similar messages and maybe at the expense of their time.

### Scope of the Programme

a) FFS established

	Kenya	Uganda	Tanzania	Total
Extension-run	199	195	117	511
Farmer-run	234	225	50	509
DLG/NGOs	38	70	0	108
Total	471	490	167	1128

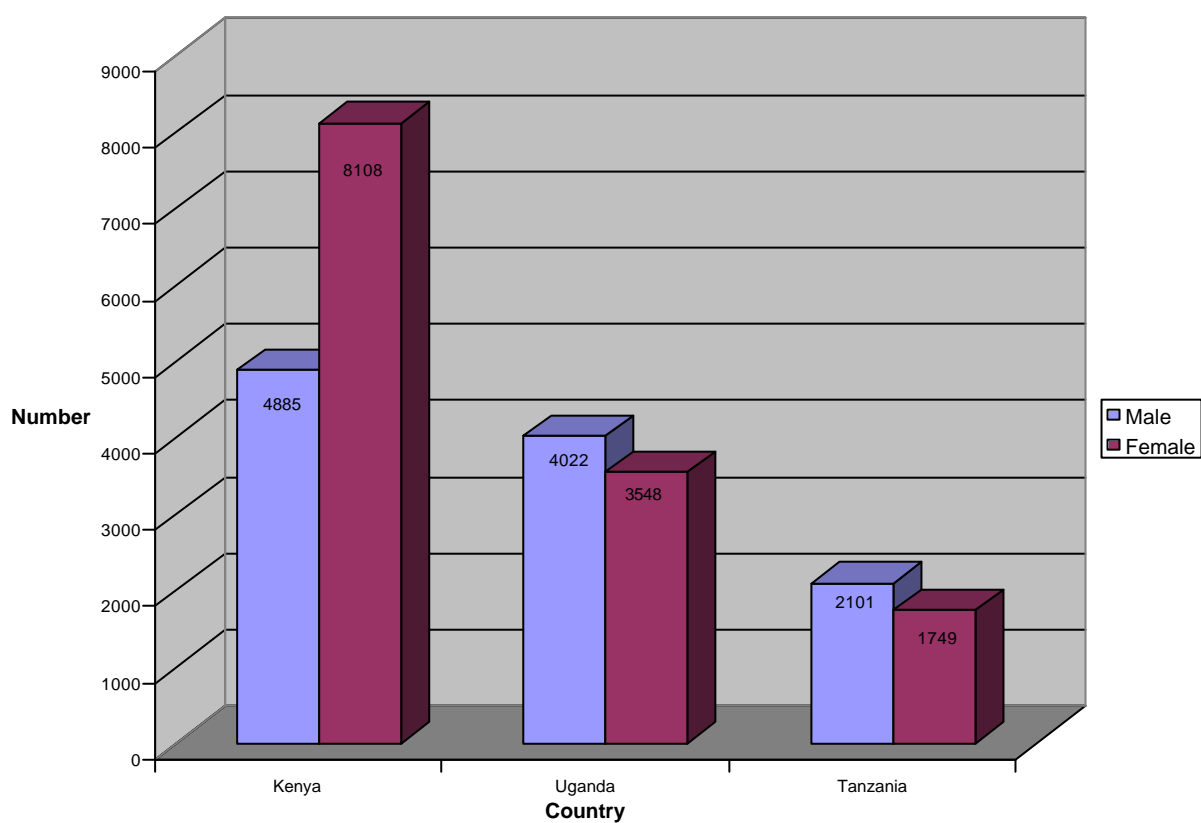
Figure 1. FFS Established



b) Number of farmer participants

	Male	Female	Total
Kenya	4885	8108	12993
Uganda	4022	3548	7570
Tanzania	2101	1749	3850
Total	11888	13405	24413

Figure 2. Gender Profile



c) Crop focus

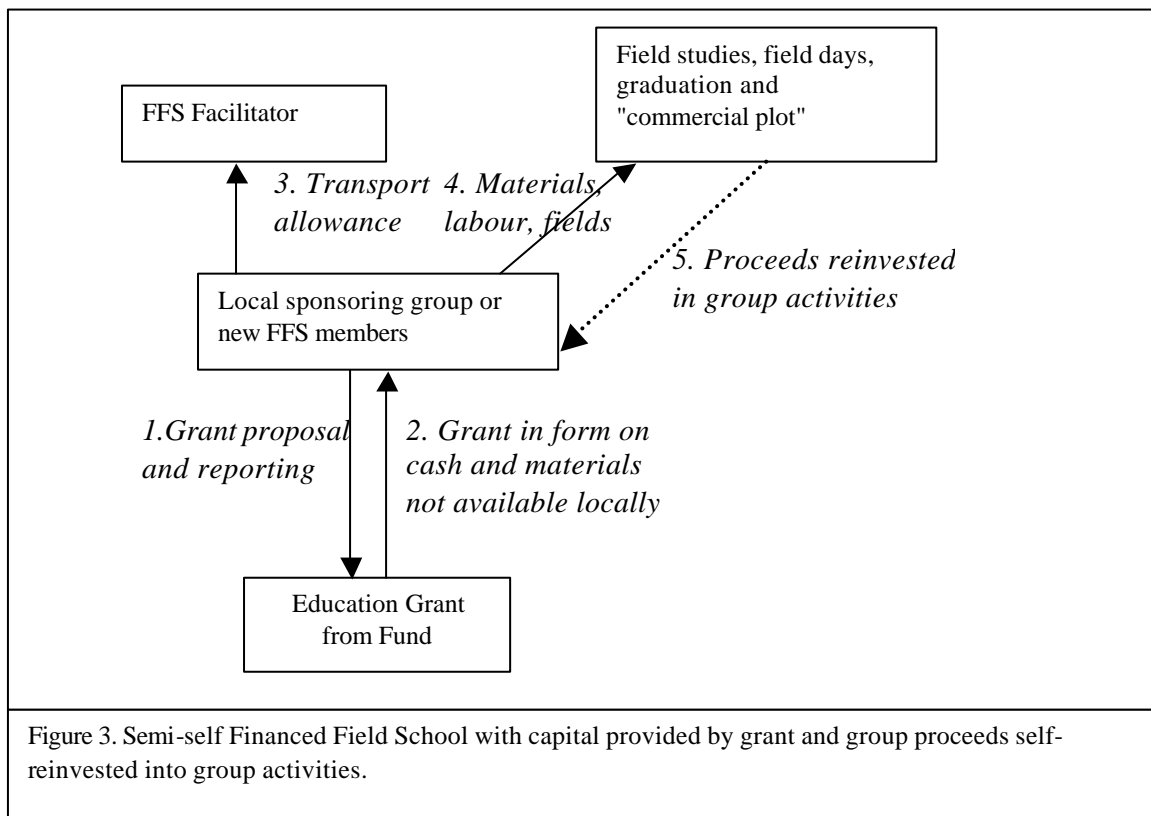
Kenya	Uganda	Tanzania
Vegetables	Cotton	Cooking banana
Maize and beans	Groundnuts	Cassava
Groundnuts	Sunflower	Horticulture
Sorghum	Cassava	Livestock
Local chickens	Vegetables	
Cassava	Bean intercrop	
Sweetpotato	Sweetpotato	

## **Semi-financed IPPM Farmer Field Schools**

The semi-financed FFSs were initiated in 1999 with the introduction of the grant system where farmer groups write simple proposals for grants to run their FFSs. Figure 3 provides a flow chart of the procedural steps in the semi-self financed IPPM field schools. The first step is for a local sponsoring group or newly formed group to submit a grant proposal in response to an announcement that grants are available. Grant forms include prerequisites, guidelines and applications for groups. Currently, IPPM Field School grants require that the group have 3 officers (Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary) of which at least one is a woman (in mixed gender cultures), have a multi-signatory savings account, agrees to record keeping and audits, and that the grant be used for at least one high value crop and a food crop. The group may include other topics such as IPPM for poultry. An indicative budget is provided for partial guidance, but also states that extension staff should be paid based on officially published rates (although these can be negotiated). The grant form provides space for background, justification for grant and activities, workplans, budget and should include signatures of all members and the local agriculture office. See annex 1 for an example of guidelines and grant form from Kenya.

The next step (2 in figure 3) is transferring grants to groups. Typically this is a combination of materials and cash or cash alone. Materials such as flip-chart paper, crayons and other stationary are more cheaply available (or only available) in large cities so it is more efficient to provide some materials. Cash is provided in allotments, usually 50% and 50% over the season depending on the length of the Field School (e.g. annual crops are usually 4-5 month, soil and perennial crops are 12-18 months). The size of the grant for IPPM Field Schools is typically US\$100 to \$400 per season of study. The grant reporting must include book-keeping, maintaining receipts and accepting an audit. Grants can be transferred in some cases electronically to accounts and in other cases in cash. The handling and control of funds has in many cases led to farmers providing co-financing as well.

Payments to field school facilitators (3 in figure 3) are directly made by the field school at pre-agreed upon rates. If the facilitator lacks technical skills, is a poor facilitator or even has inappropriate social skills (arrogance and top-down approaches are leading problems), the group may "release or fire" the facilitator (and indeed this is known to happen). Facilitators receive important feed-back from this! If the facilitator does not show up or shows up in an inappropriate state (e.g. drunk, late, etc.), the group will not pay as well. On the other hand, the facilitators usually receive payment on the day they travel - a far better situation they feel than the filling out paper work and waiting for a delayed payment typical of most extension travel allowances. Groups may also request special topics to be delivered by specialised staff (e.g. soils, nutrition, environment etc.) for whom they use the grant to pay transport.



IPPM field school participants also arrange their own field study plots (4 in figure 3). The study plots are typically 0.2 to 1 ha. of field area and include various educational studies such as comparison trials between IPPM and conventional practices, fertility management methods, new variety testing, etc. Groups in Western Province, Kenya were the first to begin the "commercial plots" which are larger areas of field which the group manages together in order to raise more funds. These groups converted the "snack" budget line to field inputs to get started. This has now been institutionalised so that it is recommended that all groups have the commercial plots. The land arrangements depend on local conditions and include use of village land, donations from larger landowners and sharing of crop produce with owners. It is the responsibility of the participants to provide the land and the labour for the study fields and commercial plots. It is the responsibility of the Facilitator to provide a profitable educational activity including bringing in socially important issues such as HIV/AIDS, women's reproductive health, soil fertility management, etc.

Finally proceeds from the field school plots (5 in figure 3) are re-invested in the group's own account. This has now become possible because all grant recipient field schools must have their own accounts and means of managing them. The funds are used by the group for further study, purchase of animals or other activities. Each group is also requested to assist in training one other group and farmer-led field schools are quite successful.

As a result of this grant process, groups have shown a very high level of ownership of the field school process and many field schools enjoy a high level of matching funds, material inputs provided by the community and participants and an increasing ability to manage funds and activities on their own. Groups become independent of extension

while extension has better partners (although many extension services have difficulty seeing this still). The process of grants (making work plans, budgets, organising fields, paying facilitators and managing funds) also allows groups to organise themselves to continue on their own. Although field school grants are intended to support a group for study purposes for a time bound period, many field school participants go on to develop longer-term associations due to their cohesion, trust and joint funding raising ability developed during the field school period. The grants capitalise groups and catalyse new ways of working together. Case studies from various beneficiary self-financed groups indicate that if well guided the groups are able to recover the whole grant after a couple of seasons. As a result self-financed FFSs are emerging where the grant has been transformed into an educational revolving loan.

### **Self Financed IPPM FFS (*From Education Grants to Education Loans*)**

Although semi-self financed IPPM field schools partially solve at least one issue of farmer group sustainability, extension officers need a new set of funds each season of FFS to keep the programme expanding year after year. Thus new ideas have been sought by IPPM facilitators and farmers resulting in the self-financed model (see figure 4). The basic difference with this model and the semi-self financing is that the group is recipient of revolving funds, not a grant. The loan-requesting group must agree by group contract that they will return the operational costs of the IPPM field school to the revolving fund. The concept is similar to revolving seed funds in which one kilogram of seed provided at the beginning of the season is repaid with one or more kilograms of seed at the end of the season. In the self financed field school case, operational costs are pre-financed and the group returns the operational fee at the end of the season through funds raised in the field plots and through educational fees.

The model allows very resource poor farmers to participate as they are able to help generate funds for the FFS fund through contributing their labour through parts of the season. It is conceivable, perhaps even more effective, that instead of cash repayment farmers would replenish with in-kind contributions. This would make better use of transport funds provided to the facilitator by allowing commodities to be converted to cash outside the farm where commodity prices are usually higher.

Operational guidelines are being developed by the core facilitators, farmer facilitators and representatives of the Farmer Field School networks on how best the educational revolving fund can be implemented taking into consideration key concerns like the security of the revolving fund from local "leakage" and the problem of payback during drought or flood. This is more problematic but it is felt that either farmers will have to pay with educational fees or that the repayment be reduced in proportion to typical yield losses seen in the field. The rational is to come up with an operational framework that can blend into the existing structures (FFSs, FFS Networks, Extension system, Political, Civil etc) with minimum overhead costs. See annex ii for an example of guidelines and agreement form being used in Uganda. The FFS-Networks provide the most suitable structure for handling the revolving fund.

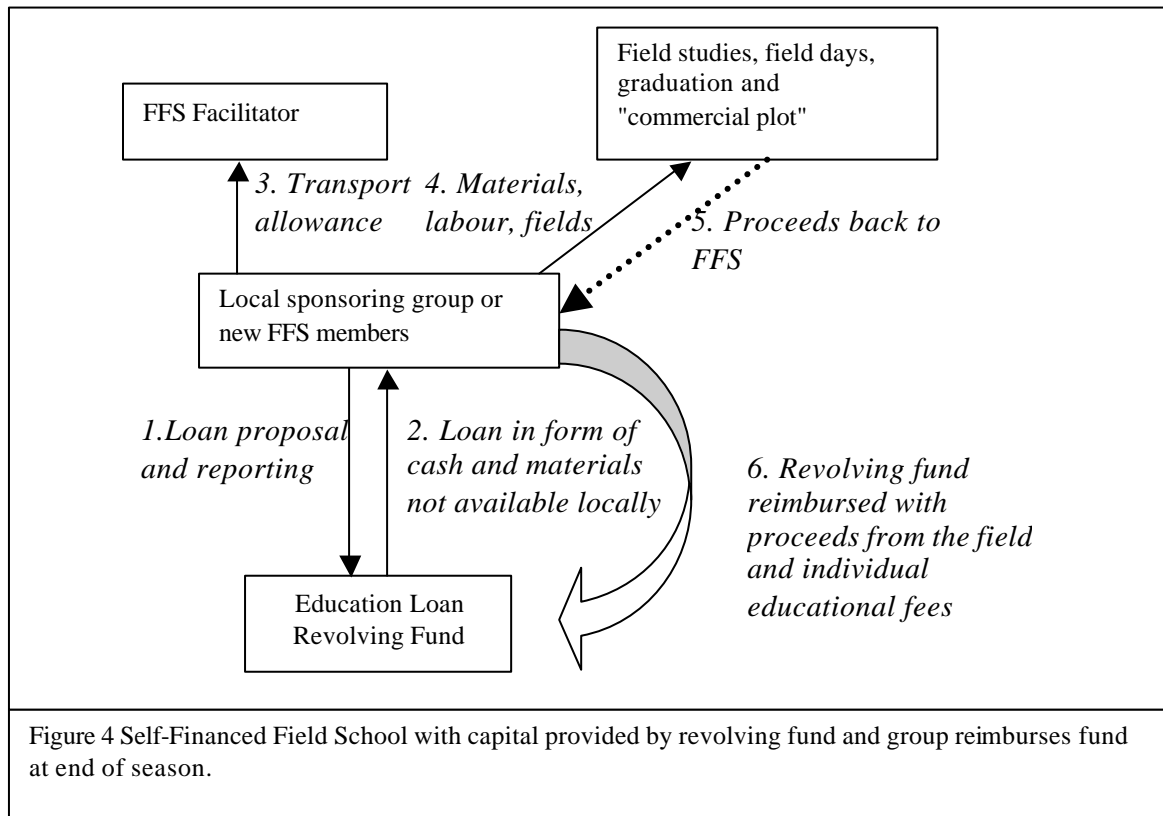


Figure 4 Self-Financed Field School with capital provided by revolving fund and group reimburses fund at end of season.

The major concern is the issue of reputation. The model requires that farmers trust the knowledge and educational ability of IPPM facilitators before signing the contract. Unfortunately, the top-down programmes of the past have given many extension systems a poor reputation so this may be the most serious issue. Retraining of extension staff towards IPPM facilitators with technical and facilitation skills has helped, but the farmers' long-term experiences with extension services may be difficult to overcome.

Post-FFS activities are effective mechanisms to build on the group development investment of FFS. FFS groups are good research partners for topics such as soil conservation and new crop introduction. The groups are also becoming more involved in social issues such as HIV/AIDS through a process called Farmer Life Schools in which field ecology is extended to human ecology.

A positive development giving a ray of hope is the increasing interest of the local governments and some NGOs in the approach to the extent of committing some of their meagre funds to sponsor establishment of FFS. As a result, the FFSs are recognised as a major conduit for community development. Similarly, rural micro-finance institutions are also using the FFSs as an entry point for group loans. In Uganda, Village Banks have been established by the private sector promotion centres in the three pilot districts where the FFSs are able to buy shares and acquire simple loans. The same centres provide financial management skills to the groups. In Kenya some farmers have begun pulling together resources and funding FFS activities, the so-called self-sponsored Farmers field schools. This level of confidence in the FFSs indicates a very bright future, which will be strengthened more by the self-financing approach.

## Annex i

### **Guidelines and Proposal Form for Self financed IPPM Farmer Field Schools (IPPM-FFS)**

#### **Description:**

This revolving fund is made available by and implemented through the FAO Global IPM Facility in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development. The fund is intended to support community study of integrated production and pest management (IPPM) through a process known as the Farmer Field School (FFS).

The amount is intended to cover the inputs for the group study field and Commercial activities, group stationary, Fielddays, Graduation, Exchange visits and official travel for FFS facilitator and special topic facilitators. The total amount available, which will have to be repaid, will be limited to a maximum of US\$ 500.

#### Requirements for Award:

The following requirements are guidelines to receive the funds.

1. The attached proposal form must be completed in full, and approved by the District agricultural heads
2. The Chairman, secretary and Treasurer must sign the attached contract form
3. The group must be registered with the social services department and have office bearers in place
4. The group must have a multi-signature account (3 signatures) in a bank.
5. The group must be able to provide an FFS study area
6. The group must provide the tools and labour inputs necessary to manage the FFS study area.
7. At the end of the FFS study period, the group's office bearers must submit a report of FFS activities, including a financial report that includes receipts of items paid for by the fund
8. The group must indicate clearly how they are going to repay the amount
9. The group must allow inspection of financial records by the project management from time to time.
10. The amount must be repaid back at the end of the two seasons (end of year)

**SELF FINANCED FARMERS FIELD SCHOOL (FFS) PROPOSAL FORM**  
**Year .....**

Please discuss the following items among group members and fill in as completely as possible the following points together with the IPPM-FFS facilitator and submit to the project management. Attach extra pages if necessary. Thank you.

Group name:.....  
Group address: .....  
Account information<sup>5</sup>:.....  
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Group introduction/background<sup>6</sup>: .....

Proposed IPPM-FFS activities<sup>7</sup>: .....

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Workplan<sup>8</sup>: .....

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Detailed Budget<sup>9</sup> .....

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<sup>5</sup> Include bank name, branch, account name and account number.  
<sup>6</sup> Explain the activities of your group and community activities in general including group objectives and membership.  
<sup>7</sup> Describe the crop/livestock to be studied, and the economic benefits expected as a result of this IPPM-FFS activity.  
<sup>8</sup> Provide starting date, meeting dates, and the expected graduation/Field Day date. Also attach a list of members to be enrolled in the IPPM-FFS including name, gender and age.  
<sup>9</sup> Provide list of materials, supplies and other items to be purchased here or on a separate sheet.

Group Contribution<sup>10</sup>

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Total Amount requested:.....

Repayment Details<sup>11</sup>

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**Contract:** (Binding only when proposal meets all the conditions stipulated in the guidelines. To be signed by Chairman, Secretary and treasurer)

We,

.....  
.....

Undertake that work will be carried out, accounts maintained, reporting made in accordance with the given guidelines and that the amount will be repayed back in full as per the above repayment details. We also undertake that the project will be terminated upon proven unsatisfactory performance and any amount so spent refunded to the project management.

Signature: Chairman..... Date.....  
Secretary.....Date.....  
Treasurer.....Date.....

Signatures (Name, Signature and Date):

Chairperson: .....  
Secretary: .....  
Treasurer: .....

IPPM-FFS Facilitator:.....

DALEO:.....

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<sup>10</sup> Describe contribution from group.

<sup>11</sup> Describe in details the repayment details and procedure i.e. how the group is going to pay back the amount

## Annex ii

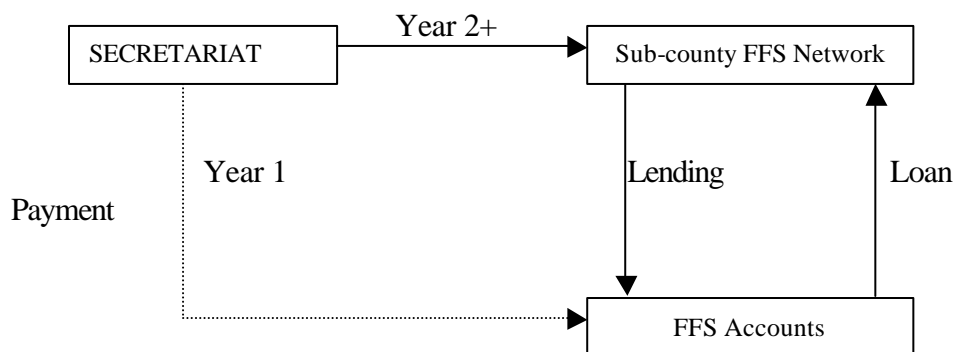
### PROPOSED GUIDELINES & OPERATIONALISATION OF THE FFS EDUCATIONAL REVOLVING TRAINING FUND

#### 1. Who should be In-Charge of Distributing the Money?

It was agreed that the main conduit of the revolving training fund be the Sub-county FFS Networks. A sub-county network comprises representatives from each of the FFSs (Alumni and on going) in the sub-county. The sub-county chief and core facilitators are part of the network. However, a smaller select committee comprising the Network executive (Chairperson, Treasure and Secretary), the sub-county chief and the core facilitators select the beneficiaries following a stipulated criteria. The core facilitator will be secretary to the sub-county network<sup>12</sup> at the selection meetings till an appropriate structure is in place. Likewise, the district FFS co-ordinators will be secretaries to the District FFS Network that comprises representatives from the respective sub-county networks with the District Agricultural Officer as an arbitrator.

Funds from the National FFS Secretariat/FAO Representation will be transferred to the sub-county FFS Network accounts. Then based on the proposals from the new FFSs in the sub-county transfers will be made to the individual accounts of the FFSs that meet the criteria set by the sub-county FFS Network. However, in the first year (2002) funds from the secretariat will be transferred directly to the individual FFSs accounts because the sub-county networks are yet to open accounts.

The sub-county FFS Network will be charged with the monitoring and recovery of the educational revolving fund. It will also have the responsibility of identifying the beneficiaries in the preceding years.



#### 2. Who qualifies for the Money?

<sup>12</sup> In the initial stages as the networks build capacity, the role of the facilitators on the network is still very vital especially in the planning and visioning aspects

Each Sub-county Network will come up with a set of guidelines/criteria for selecting the groups to benefit from the scheme. Some of the key aspects to be incorporated are

- Existing Group with a common interest
- Willing to be trained
- Group should be ready to repay the loan promptly in full
- Have a bank account
- Willing to pay the facilitators as per the stipulated terms
- Have a vision on income generating activities of farming nature, backed by realistic workplans and Positive Projected Income Statements
- The Enterprise should be owned by the Group
- The activities should reflect the focus of IPPM training goals and the enterprises should be short term (annuals) for continuity of the revolving fund
- Must have sound rules and regulations guiding, by laws (Constitution??)
- The group must indicate the internal procedure for recovery of the Revolving funds
- Every member of the group should indicate his/her minimum guarantee amount towards the recovery of the revolving fund
- The executives of the group be guarantors to the Revolving Fund

**3. When should the Money be Returned?**

- Loan duration is 6 - 12 Months
- All the Money shall be recovered prior to the onset of the first rains

**4. Who are the Signatories to the Sub-County Network Bank Account?**

- Core Facilitator - represents the donor
- Treasurer - represents the farmers
- Sub-County Chief - represents the local government

**NB:-** Current Accounts be opened and all the three must sign for any transaction.

**5. What happens in case of Crop Failure?**

The causes should be studied, evaluated and action taken according the respective sub-county network guidelines.

**Roles of District Network**

- Monitoring
- Sub-County which recovers best gets bonus- This will be recommended by the District Network
- District FFS coordinator becomes Secretary to the District Network

**IPPM-FFS REVOLVING EDUCATIONAL FUND AGREEMENT**

This agreement is made this ..... Day of..... 20.....

Between ..... FFS located in ..... village,  
 ..... Parish ..... Sub-county ..... District  
 hereby referred to as borrowers on one part and ..... Sub-county FFS Network  
 hereby referred to as a lender on one part, under the terms and conditions herein below agreed:

**This agreement witnesseth as follows:**

The Sub-county Network lends to the FFS the sum of U shs (in words) .....  
 ..... for a period of ..... months to  
 be repayable to the lender as it is hereby agreed between both parties, that in the event of the  
 borrower failing to pay back on time herein after agreed the lender shall take legal action  
 against the borrower.

- The borrower should be having a desire for education/being trained and that the funds borrowed are towards achieving this objective
- The activities should reflect the focus of IPPM training goals and the enterprises should be short term (annuals) for continuity of the educational revolving fund
- The Borrower will pay all the facilitators' dues which are in-built into the borrowed sum
- Have a vision on income generating activities of farming nature
- All FFS members participate in development of the proposal and sign consent
- Every member of the FFS should indicate and sign his/her minimum guarantee amount towards the recovery of the revolving fund
- The FFS should initiate savings groups within the FFS
- The group should have an active bank account with up to date audit of accounts
- The FFS should be ready to repay the educational fund promptly
- The group must show an internal procedure for recovery of the educational grant
- Must have a sound rules and regulations (Constitution) and registered at the district
- The executives of the group will be guarantors to the educational revolving loan
- Proposed workplan should be attached

In accordance with the purpose stated in the loan application form duly signed by the borrower. The borrower shall not divert the loan for any other purpose other than the one applied for.

As security for the loan the borrower hereby enlists the members of the FFS indicating their individual minimum guarantee amount towards the recovery of the educational revolving fund.

	Names	Amount	Signature

1.			
2.			
3.			
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30.			

**Note:** The guarantors are fully liable for the repayment of the loan in case of default.

**Signatures (Name, Signature and date)**

.....  
**FFS Chairperson**

.....  
**FFS Secretary**

.....  
**FFS Treasurer**

.....  
**Core Facilitator**

.....  
**Farmer facilitator (1)**

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**Farmer facilitator (2)**

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**Sub-County Chief**

.....  
**Sub-County FFS Network Chairperson**

.....  
**District Agricultural Officer (*Arbitrator*)**