

Summary of Food For Thought (FFT) External Evaluation Report for the period 2005-2012

1. Aims of the report

The Food For Thought (FFT) programme was initiated in 2001 with the creation of links between pairs of school in Uganda and the United Kingdom. The programme has now evolved to include 35 pairs of schools, with implementation in four districts of Uganda: Gulu/Amuru, Mubende, Tororo and one special needs school in Kampala. The principal aim of FFT is to provide pupils, staff members and their surrounding communities with skills and knowledge in sustainable organic agriculture, thus contributing towards strengthening food security among the stakeholders and their communities, and improving nutrition through the provision of school meals and the domestic production of vegetables. Pupils thus acquire skills that will help them to feed themselves and generate an income after school. In addition, the programme offers a platform by which stakeholders in both Uganda and the United Kingdom can share experience, knowledge and resources by reciprocal learning.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation used a sampling of 40 per cent of the FFT schools in each district, that is half of the 12 participating schools in each of Mubende and Tororo and two of the five schools in Gulu/Amuru – a total of 14 schools out of 35, all of whom have been part of the programme for at least five years. The methodology consisted of semi-structured interviews (with head teachers, garden/agriculture teachers, parents and pupils), direct observation and use of secondary data obtained from sources such as District Development Plans. Some difficulties were encountered in obtaining reliable quantifiable data at the schools as careful record keeping has not always been maintained.

The situation of each school is described in some detail in the report, from which generalised conclusions are drawn. There is, however, a recognition that each school is different, set in its own size of plot, soil type and community location.

2. Evaluation findings

This research aims to evaluate the extent to which the FFT programme succeeds in its principal aim of building long-term capacity and sustainability in agriculture and food security. It begins by examining the ability of the programme to conduct specific activities efficiently and effectively as management and governance have previously been shown as of significant importance for success.

Interviews were conducted with the District FFT Programme Coordinator who heads the work in each district. This work includes the coordination of monthly head teachers' meetings and the submission of a district report (prepared from reports from the Key Farmer Trainers (KFTs) and the FFT School Management committees), which is sent to Kulika, the UK coordinator and the District Focal Person. Termly reports are produced by each school and sent to their link school in the UK, thus ensuring accountability for the funds provided by that link school. Monthly meetings bring together these different stakeholders to try and offer better guidance and improvement to the programme. These meetings are hosted by different schools in rotation and are mainly attended by head teachers, garden teachers, lead teachers and KFTs. These occasions allow for immediate problem solving and sharing of knowledge by the various participants.

Tororo

In addition to the regular meetings as described above connections have been established with other local like-minded government-run programmes, such as the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), with the intention of enabling the FFT programme to become self-sustainable. Furthermore the District Chairperson LCV has been approached with the idea of incorporating the FFT programme into the district development plans for agriculture and there are plans to move this initiative forward.

A major issue has been the transfer of head teachers – eight out of twelve of the original head teachers have been moved out of FFT schools. Attempts have been made by the District FFT Coordinators to encourage the District Education authorities to restrict such transfers to being within FFT schools in order to lessen the impact on the FFT programme, but so far with little success. Complications arise when such transfers also involve the promotion of staff.

Communication with the UK link schools is still a challenge, mainly because of lack of internet access in rural Uganda.

Gulu/Amuru

The main challenge is that there has been only one KFT in the district since the death of Mr Alier Patrick in 2006. Mr Alier was very active, but there has been little opportunity recently for the training of garden teachers. A roll down system is used after any FFT training so that many more teachers may benefit from it, but many of the techniques (such as soil and water conservation, production of liquid manure and compost) are not being practised in the schools. Visits to the schools showed that there has been little, if any, work on food security gardens. There are currently discussions with Send a Cow to see if they are able to give some assistance.

There are also concerns about the management and governance of the FFT programme in this district as it lacks a definite structure. The District FFT Programme Coordinator manages the communication between the UK National Coordinator and Kulika, which is done mainly through phone calls and emails.

Mubende

The management structure here includes a rotational District Chairman, selected from the head teachers of the FFT schools, who acts as a link between the head teachers and the FFT programme. The District Focal Person is the Inspector of Schools, who is the responsible person from the district administration. The monthly report is submitted to this person as well as to those indicated above. The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders at school level are discussed and refined at the head teachers' meetings, being revised every four to five years.

There are currently nine KFTs who are involved in FFT work, each being responsible for two schools. It was alleged that some of the KFTs are not fulfilling their duties, but the District Chairman explained that this was for financial reasons. Some of the schools have been phased out of the FFT programme yet their KFT has remained under a volunteer arrangement or on half pay. This affects the quality of service offered by the KFT yet the school continues to expect the service provided when fully paid. Issues of the cost of transport for KFTs were also raised – providing an interesting comparison with Tororo where KFTs visit schools weekly under a privately agreed arrangement in order to boost the programme. In Mubende the KFT visits at least once a month and works with the garden teacher and pupils, leaving assignments to be completed later. Unfortunately not all garden teachers are well trained in organic agriculture.

There were also issues of head teacher transfers here, as in the other districts. The District leadership has agreed in principle not to make such transfers out of the FFT programme, but transfers continue to take place.

2.2 Impact of the FFT programme

The principal successes identified by this research include:

- the introduction of appropriate organic farming practices and seedlings which the pupils are encouraged to take home and use, resulting in significant financial benefits to the family;
- the increasing ability for the schools to provide a mid-day meal for its pupils from the food crops they produce;

- events such as the annual celebrations for World Food Day and regular parents meetings are proving to be successful methods for communicating ideas with the local community;
- the resulting change in the previously-held negativity surrounding agricultural work, that it is 'dirty and fit only for failures' (Tororo District FFT Programme Coordinator).

2.2.1 On agricultural practices within the school and its community

Examples of sustainable organic practices are given from many of the schools visited. It is concluded that none of the practises existed before the introduction of the FFT programme. They can be attributed solely to the influence of the FFT programme. These practices include:

- Maintenance of soil fertility through preparation and use of organic manure/compost from organic waste
- Use of natural pest control through making of organic pesticides and mulching of crops to suppress weeds
- Water conservation techniques – mulching, contour ditches, drip irrigation
- Efficient land use techniques – planting crops in rows rather than broadcasting seeds, sack mounds/bag gardens, mandala gardens
- Encouragement to grow an increasing diversity and quantity of crops at home
- Methods of increasing growing capacity – veranda gardens, key hole beds, use of vertical space
- Seed/nursery beds
- Improved banana management
- Agro-forestry
- Use of tip-taps
- Animal traction
- Energy saving cooking stoves
- Separating waste – composting organic matter and burying/burying inorganic
- Animal husbandry

All schools reported significant improvements in their crops after they began to prepare and apply manure/compost. In some places it was reported that this was also contributing towards the management of environmental pollution in the schools through the separation of organic and inorganic waste.

The surrounding communities were also benefitting because the pupils obtained planting materials and skills from the school FFT programme and adopted them in their home gardens. This has included not only agricultural techniques but also the use of tip taps and energy saving stoves.

2.2.2 On the nutrition of pupils and their surrounding communities

The FFT programme has introduced new nutritious crops such as sukuma wiki and green aramanthus to the schools. These, with other more traditional crops, are prepared for the pupils to eat. Although the crops are mostly vegetables, some schools are now also producing fruit for their pupils.

The food crops are contributing towards the provision of food for the pupils and teachers in the schools. This leads to improved nutrition and thus improved attention levels in the pupils and an increase in time for teachers as they no longer have to search for food in the lunch break.

Pupils and staff members are also provided with seedlings to take home, so their meals at home are also improved nutritionally. Sales of produce have sometimes led to the purchase of chickens and, in one case, a pig, the profits from these activities contributing to the purchase of scholastic materials and clothing.

However, it is evident that the quantity of food produced in each school is inadequate to achieve the recommended dietary allowance for all pupils. Some of the schools have adopted innovative methods of

dealing with this issue, for example: meals are given on a class by class basis, or during the harvest period, or porridge is provided when the maize harvest has been turned into flour.

It is also apparent that many parents have become convinced by the efforts of their children in their home gardens: one pupil is reported to have made over 230,000 Uganda shillings from her latest harvest.

2.2.3 On long-held negative attitudes towards agriculture

This was not an intended outcome but it is reassuring to note that agriculture is no longer being seen as a means of punishment for pupils and, being a dirty occupation, is only fit for academic failures. This is largely due to the financial success of the school gardens.

2.2.4 On the teaching and learning of science

The participatory learning, so important for agriculture, is making the teaching of the subject simpler and more enjoyable. It includes the elements of food processing, food preservation and horticultural activities which are able to earn quick and ready money for the pupils.

2.2.5 Contribution of the teacher exchange visits to the learning process

Teacher visits are made possible through grants from the British government Department for International Development (DfID). Visiting teachers take part in the delivery of lessons and contribute to the wider international exposure for the schools, thus contributing to the further training of the staff. The presence of international staff also helps to relieve the teaching loads of the local staff, though it was widely recognised that the two weeks of a visit is very short.

2.2.6 On the staff members in the schools

The staff benefit from the meals that can now be provided in the schools, as well as receiving seedlings when they are distributed. A number of staff also benefit from the training given by the KFTs, and in Tororo the staff are actively being encouraged to attend the agriculture classes. Many staff now supplement their income as a result of practising improved agriculture at home.

Garden teachers are also subject to transfer to non-FFT schools so an annual garden teachers' training workshop is now being arranged with the aim of bringing the skills of all garden teachers to a similar level.

2.2.7 Contribution to the learning and knowledge attainment process by pupils

Although training schedules vary from school to school, it is clear that training is a significant part of the FFT programme. The school gardens in those which conduct weekly training sessions are better than in those which hold termly training. Furthermore, the best results are found where the activities are timetabled into the official timetables. Thus it is recommended that all schools should do this.

2.2.8 On infrastructural development

The setting up of rain collection and water storage systems has not been a specific aim of the programme, but their impact has been significant for the lives of both pupils and staff. This ranges from the irrigation of school gardens during the dry season to the provision of water for the school kitchen and toilets. Thus pupils are able to spend more time in class instead of many exhausting hours in collecting water from distant sources. Pupil health has also improved with the provision of fresh uncontaminated water. In some cases the local community has also been given access to the water.

Increased pupil enrolment has occurred as a result of the new classrooms and latrine blocks (built by the associated New Build) and the provision of meals.

2.3 Other benefits

The FFT coordinator in Tororo offers training in cake making from time to time.

The FFT programme is able to be flexible, meeting the different needs of the schools in appropriate ways and enabling the contributions of both schools and their pupils to the design of the training materials. Training is based on the core programme objectives but also remains relevant to the local context.

Exchange visits between local schools have inspired the participants, providing them with ideas on how to improve their school gardening practices. This has led to the idea of establishing a Young Farmers Network to extend such visits, invite prominent local farmers as guest speakers, and arrange study tours and seminars on specific topics. Such a network would help to fill the void in accessing relevant and quality agriculture knowledge, particularly as the FFT programme is less supported by the government agricultural extension services such as NAADS.

2.4 Challenges and threats to the sustainability of the programme

2.4.1 Challenges in the reported schools

Tororo

Funding gaps, limitation of/poor quality land, lack of tools, destruction of the crops by stray animals or the surrounding community, lack of fencing material, lack of involvement of NAADS, drought, and the loss of interest in academic achievement when agriculture provides good profits.

Gulu/Amuru

Lack of training, insufficient funding or sent at the wrong time, theft/destruction of crops and tools by people and animals, lack of links with government agricultural programmes, lack of fencing.

Mubende

Lack of land and/or funding, stray animals destroying crops, lack of links with government agricultural programmes, lack of funds at the right time, lack of sensitisation of local community, lack of fencing and tools, lack of water in dry season.

The full list may be found in the table on p.35.

2.4.2 Challenges expressed by the district administrators

All three district administrators greatly appreciated the efforts undertaken by the FFT programme – and wanted them extended.

In Tororo the Inspector of Schools said he would like every school to grow at least four acres of maize ie sufficient to meet the needs of the school. so far no school is achieving this – the average size of the school gardens is only 2.4 acres. He also commented on the reluctance of FFT school teachers to be transferred because they perceive that the FFT programme brings more benefits to the schools. The Inspector believes that teachers should not stay long in any one school because this causes them to lose their drive towards improvement, but it can be argued that the teachers in FFT schools make such a large contribution to the programme that they feel part of the process and so are reluctant to leave these schools. If the new head teacher comes from outside the FFT programme, the school suffers a definite setback. Efforts are being made in all districts to ensure that transfers of head teachers are made within the FFT schools.

In Mubende the updating of information from the schools to the DEO is inconsistent. The Acting DEO has not been invited to meetings neither has he been sent its reports. It was pointed out that more efficient reporting would enable the District to work more closely with the FFT programme, particularly in one instance where a head teacher went to the UK at the time of the Primary Leaving Examinations, without discussing it with the district authorities who would have advised a rescheduling of the visit. Setting up a

database has been suggested but it seems that a database is required more for the benefit of the district than to fulfil the aims of the FFT programme.

A further concern is that schools are challenged when they attempt to fundraise to buy seeds, tools and so on. Since the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) parents have become reluctant to make any contributions towards activities at the schools, seeing it as the role of the government although government funding has been reduced over the years. However, governmental officers continue to inform parents that they should not be bothered by funding requests from the schools and this causes problems when funds for activities such as those of FFT are requested. A programme such as FFT is not a government priority.

Other challenges were also mentioned by the interviewees, challenges which are neither within the aims nor the scope of the current FFT programme, such as increasing the number and length of teacher exchange visits to the UK, increasing the commercialisation of the school agricultural plots.

2.4.3 Sustainability of the FFT model and exit strategy

The report quotes the example of Kirume School, Mubende, one of the first schools to join the FFT programme. Funding has ended but the school is still involved in aspects of the programme and continues to perform very well in sustainable agriculture. This confirms that the programme builds a strong element of sustainability preparation such that work is able to continue without the support of funds and is able to remain within the FFT umbrella if it wishes to do so.

Schools are being encouraged to include value-added enterprises, such as juice production and bakery. Such activities contribute to financial stabilisation in preparation for self-reliance. Possibly the Ugandan schools could make requests of their UK partner schools for items such as used computers which could be shared amongst neighbouring schools, though it is recognised that the cost and logistics of transportation may cause problems. The main problem is that most of the FFT schools are located away from the power grid and numbers may not justify the purchase of a generator to supply electricity.

2.5 Improvement areas

Interviewees were asked to offer solutions to some of the challenges mentioned in this report. Most replies were for aspects which either they could provide themselves or which are already part of the programme. Other stakeholders were also asked for their ideas but it became obvious that they were not in line with the aims of the FFT programme.

Conclusion

- a) The FFT programme has made a significant contribution to the change in agricultural systems in the communities in which it has been operating. Many good practices have been adopted and the planting materials are in such high demand that they are being stolen from the gardens - with highly destructive results.
- b) There have been nutritional improvements in the diets of the school communities as a result of the introduction of new techniques, as well as to household food security and income.
- c) Long-held negative attitudes to agriculture have changed to positive ones.
- d) The participatory learning style means skills are being learnt more quickly and knowledge is being better retained than formerly – and a wider world view is being acquired.
- e) There has been a significant contribution towards infrastructural development in the schools, such as classrooms, water harvesting systems, storage tanks, staff houses.
- f) The idea of a young farmers' network has been warmly received.
- g) There has been a positive impact upon the lives of the pupils and their families as a result of taking home the ideas learnt at school.
- h) The constraints in the programme are location specific and not a reflection of weakness in the design and operational model of the programme.