

**Summary of the study on
The impact of Farmer Field Schools on Gender Relations in Kenya
Version 30 March 2017**

This document summarizes the following article:

Friis-Hansen et al., 2012. Less noise in the household: the impact of Farmer Field School of Research on Gender Relations. Journal of Research, Gender and Development (ISS: 2251-0036) Vol. 2(2) pp. 044-055, February 2012. (<http://www.interesjournals.org/jrpgd/february-2012-vol-2-issue-2/-less-noise-in-the-household-the-impact-of-farmer-field-schools-on-gender-relations>)

The studied FFS: This study concerned FFS in the Kakamega District in western Kenya, an area with high poverty levels (50% living in absolute poverty), small-holder farming being the main economic activity and a large and well-functioning FFS programme. Apart from the technical farming-related issues, also some non-agricultural issues were integrated in the FFS curriculum, such as HIV/Aids and domestic violence. The article states that “As all participants in FFS are expected to be actively engaged in all field of activities and rotate roles such as discussion leaders, presenters, hosts, etc., traditional gender roles are downplayed, leaving space for individual expressions.”

Methodology: The study involved interviews with 22 current or graduate FFS participants and 8 group interviews, using purposely sampling. Also key informants were interviewed, such as FFS facilitators.

FINDINGS:

1. Gender relations in FFS groups

The FFS groups in the study areas were made up of about 60% women and 40% men. While membership was dominated by women, elected leadership positions tended to be held by men, apart from the post of treasurer, which often was held by a woman.

A dynamic and positive atmosphere in the groups was observed, where men and women seemed at ease and interact with each other in a more relaxed and freer manner than is normally the case among adults of the opposite sex. The structure of the FFS, that dictates that all participants should be equally involved in all activities, make it possible for individuals to explore roles outside culturally accepted norms.

2. Changing roles and habits in the households

Participants stated that gendered roles and habits, based on who should be doing what kinds of duties within the community or household, are gradually starting to change, and the FFS seemed to have contributed to this. Many respondents reported an increase in women being breadwinners in the household and contributing economically to the upkeep of the family. The increased responsibility for the household economy taken up by many women seemed not to be taken as a threat by men but rather as a relief.

3. Change in gendered customs and traditions

Traditional beliefs and taboos related to farming practices in Kakamega included beliefs that men should not grow vegetables, women cannot plant trees or bananas, sweet potato should be planted by women only and women should not eat eggs or chicken meat, with the breaking of such taboos being connected to a high level of fear. But by being able to experiment with “forbidden” practices within the safe space that the FFS provides, participants’ beliefs are changing because of a lack of such consequences.

4. Increased work ethic among men

FFS graduates expressed a stronger work ethic, as well as a commitment to farming and their work. This was especially the case among men, who would typically tend to spend less time in the bar with other men and more time at home on the farm.

5. Changed view of women among men

The interviews had it made apparent that there is a general belief among men that women are not capable of thinking and reasoning in the same way as men. This belief had started to change through the relationships

developed among men and women in FFS. An official stated “When we have been going through the FFS training most of us have come to discover that a woman is just as much a person as a man”. Not only the men started seeing women as more equal; also the women were giving less attention to the differences across gender.

6. Spousal collaboration and shared decision-making

FFS members referred to how the collaborative learning in FFS has induced relationship changes in the spousal unit in terms of increased collaboration and joint decision-making between husband and wife. This was often referred to as something new and a change in a culture in which the man takes the most decisions. The group discussion in FFS is likely a place where participants learn how to engage in more discussion at the household level. As one participant said: “The group discussion tool is not only used at a group level, but is also used at domestic level when there are aspects of school fees, children.

Participants referred to how “noise” (arguments and quarrels between husband and wife) in the household has declined following FFS participation, and how there is no more peace at home. Much of this “noise” seemed to be a consequence of financial stress and of conflicting priorities in the households. By both parties contributing to the household economy, there is less criticism of women that their husbands are not living up to their responsibilities.

DISCUSSION:

The study seems to indicate that men and women who participate in FFS experienced a change in a “frame of reference”, particularly concerning how they view and relate to each other. Women, with ever-greater confidence, were beginning to see themselves as a viable source of knowledge, particular for issues outside the maintenance of the household (e.g. farming). Men were also recognizing women as a viable source of knowledge. And there was increased engagement in shared decision-making by men and women within the household.

Men learned to relate to women differently; women in FFS seem increasingly to view men as collaborators and partners. (NB Summary on the discussion not fully finished)