

Farming as a Family Business Brings Women into the Equation

By Robert Alela and Cathy Phiri

In 2004 ACDI/VOCA conducted a gender analysis at the beginning of its USAID-funded Kenya Maize Development Program (KMDP) to explore root causes for slow and failed adoption of new and improved farming practices and technologies in western Kenya. This analysis revealed that family relationships and communication patterns in households were sources of the problem.

Analysts, including a volunteer expert sent by ACDI/VOCA, saw that, for various cultural reasons, men who participated in the program rarely shared information about improved practices and technologies with women household members, yet these women were actively involved on the family farms. The analysts observed that men in the household tended to take women's time, skills, labor and contributions to the family business for granted and underutilized their potential to play a more valuable role.

To address these findings, the KMDP team decided to refine the Farming as a Business (FaaB) training. The evolution of FaaB to Farming as a Family Business (FaaFB) reflects the need to foster collective efforts between men and women in the planning and managing of family farm enterprises to help maximize household profits.

What Evolved?

The fictional character Mali Ngumu represents a farmer who does not perceive farm planning as important—a notion that is prevalent among most smallholder farmers who operate at a low level of technology. On small farms, farm organization cannot be changed as much as on large ones, but alternative farm practices, methods of production, cropping intensity, etc., offer worthwhile choices. Women participate in various aspects of agriculture, but if their contributions go unrecognized, they are not in position to adopt new and advantageous farm practices.

The FaaFB training promotes women's participation as agents and beneficiaries of agricultural production. It strives to increase opportunities for women to access training in new methods of production, and it supports their empowerment in

Mali Ngumu and His Family

Monday, 5:00 a.m. Mali Ngumu drinks his tea, bids his wife Kauka goodbye and heads for ACDI/VOCA's Farming as a Business training held at a training center a few kilometers away. He leaves his wife getting the children ready to go to school. Later she will work on the farm. Mali Ngumu will be in the workshop for five days from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. After training each day, he does not go straight home but instead spends the evening with his peers in the village. When he arrives home later, he will not have time to discuss with his wife what he learned that day in the training. This happens throughout the week. Since Kauka is semiliterate, she will not consult the training materials her husband brings home. And although Kauka does much of the farm work, as head of the household, Mali Ngumu dictates what will happen on the farm without consulting her or other members of the family. Predictably, this leads to a slow uptake in their household of the new and improved technology and approaches delivered in the training.

decision making and public life.

The FaaFB curriculum expands on FaaB, introducing the aspect of planning together as a family. The following are some of the new topics FaaFB offers:

- » Managing a household budget, and how that budget reflects the family business

- » Building strong family blocks using KMDP'S Positive Attitude Change curriculum
- » Promoting communication among family members
- » Engaging full family participation in decision making, and mobilizing and using available resources to achieve not just family effectiveness but harmony

The curriculum also now includes a module that gives women a chance to identify opportunities to add value to their farm produce.

FaaFB has also evolved from the traditional classroom structure to a more interactive process for participants. This is proving very effective in disseminating business information to farmers, especially when addressing gender issues. The modules are designed to take half a day (from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) to enable women to participate in the training and still handle their domestic chores. The training uses business games and educational posters so that people who cannot read or write can participate. For example, the Mali Ngumu posters on the right have plenty of pictures and minimal text to make even fairly complex operations understandable at a glance.

FaaFB also takes advantage of the fact that, in Kenya, almost 90 percent of rural people own a radio. Radio programs are used to reach farmers with valuable farming and business information, and they are normally aired when women are done with their domestic chores and can take time to listen. Making information available by radio gives them the opportunity to continually build their knowledge and skills.

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FaaFB Makes a Difference

Based on household surveys and the observations of field staff and extensionists, FaaFB has helped both women and youth in farming households. From distribution of labor through sharing of resources and working together as a family during planning, women and youth are strengthening their roles and improving family incomes from farming. The positive outcomes of FaaFB training are beneficial to the whole family:

- » Redistribution of household labor in recognition of the contributions of women and youth to the family farm
- » A change in farmers' attitudes that leads them to consult with their families to continuously explore better ways to organize their farms and

adopt new crops, seed varieties, animal breeds and alternative technologies to diversify production, increase productivity and reduce risks

- » More women engaging in both on- and off-farm investments to increase family incomes, e.g., diversifying into activities such as kitchen gardens, beekeeping, poultry production, dairy goat production, mushroom farming and sweet potato production and processing
- » More women keen to learn, take risks and succeed despite their low formal education levels
- » More opportunities for women to participate in farmers' groups and associations, find their voices, gain leadership experience and make decisions

Through KMDP, ACDI/VOCA provides training and technical assistance to smallholder farmers. Of these trainees, 47 percent are women. This is a significant increase since 2006, when they made up only 27 percent of the participants—an increase that can be credited to the new FaaFB training. After almost seven years of KMDP support, more than 370,000 men and women, working with their families, have quadrupled maize yields from 720 to 2,880 kg per acre, and increased net family earnings from maize sales to \$206 million in 2008.

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