



# Building Farmer Field School (FFS) Network in Uganda

## BACKGROUND OF THE NATIONAL FFS NETWORK

ESAFF Uganda, together with PELUM Uganda and with financial support from Oxfam in Uganda, are implementing the Sowing Diversity equals Harvesting Security (SD=HS) program in Uganda's Eastern and Northern regions. The SD=HS program mainly looks at changing the current unsustainable and unequal food production systems through empowering indigenous people and small-scale farmers to reclaim their role in contributing to food security and strengthening their adaptive capacity.

It aims to improve the access and use of crop diversity to change the current unsustainable and unequal food production systems, focusing on the rural poor, including women, the youth, and the elderly. The project has four pillars that focus on farmers' crop improvement and adaptation; Farmer Seed Enterprises; Local food plants for nutrition, and an enabling policy environment.

The National Farmer Field School Network is an umbrella that brings all the district FFS networks in Uganda together formed by Farmer Field School groups in Uganda to work collaboratively with the national and the Local Government authorities to support the sustainable operations of FFS groups and scale up their activities related to Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) locally and nationally.

## Objectives of The National FFS Network

1. To advocate for and represent FFS groups in the platforms and policy spaces that discuss farmers' seeds rights.
2. To take leadership in establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders.
3. To ensure that district local governments, national government, like-minded organisations and research institutions adopt the FFS approach on Participatory Plant Breeding and scale it out.
4. To promote innovations at FFS group levels.

## FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL FFS NETWORK

The rationale for the formation of the National FFS Networks was to ensure sustainability of the impact of the Farmer Field Schools; creating an enabling environment for institutional support becomes essential for expanding the effort, improving quality and ensuring impact and continuity. ESAFF Uganda is leading institutionalising the Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) using the FFS approach at the national, district and Farmer Field School levels and research institutions.

The National Farmer Field School have formed the district FFS Networks that lead the campaigns for PPB institutionalisation at the district with the District Local Government. In the respective districts, there are Farmer Field Schools and the District FFS Network. The National FFS Network is an umbrella structure that comprises representatives from different FFS in Uganda. Members participate in seeds right advocacy, market linkages, capacity strengthening, and institutionalisation of the Farmer Field School approach through the network.

The National FFS Network is led by a committee that the representatives selected from the different District FFS Networks comprising of the FFS members. The National FFS Network is a member of the East African Field Schools. The network has guiding documents to ensure the effective operation of different activities in the country, including the Memorandum of understanding (MOU) with various District Local Governments, Research Institutes and other entities and a Constitution to guide the operations by the members. ESAFF Uganda hosts the National FFS at its Secretariat in Kampala.

Since 2019, the program has established over 110 Farmer Field Schools (FFS) in Uganda, working on food diversity using Participatory Plant Breeding and utilising the Neglected and Underutilized Species (NUS) to fight against poverty, hunger and malnutrition. The program's overall objective is that 12,960 small-holder farmers, especially women and youths, enjoy their farmers' rights and can access, develop, and use Plant Genetic Resources to improve their food and nutrition security under conditions of climate change by 2022.

The responsiveness to immediate small-scale farmers' concerns has facilitated a transformation of the Farmer Field Schools to a national network for members in which small-scale farmers under their different district networks are in a position to discuss the problems within their local context and seek solutions with support most especially from the national level and other stakeholders in their localities. This development of the National FFS Network has been understood as a fundamental factor in building small-scale farmers' confidence to determine their destiny with their resources.

## MEMBERSHIP OF THE NATIONAL FFS NETWORK

The membership to the National FFS Network is open to Farmer Field Schools in different districts and regions in Uganda and the leadership of the National FFS Network is selected from representatives of District FFS networks both men and women are eligible to be part of the National FFS Network. The National FFS Networks is constituted by the District FFS Networks that comprises the FFS in Uganda.

### *The rights of members of the National FFS Network includes;*

- a. Participation in the activities of the National FFS Network.
- b. Using and enjoying the facilities of the National FFS Network.
- c. Self-expression before the members of the National FFS Network.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NATIONAL FFS NETWORK

*The National FFS Network performs a number of functions as follows;*

1. Consult national and district authorities on the government programs that can support FFS networks and groups affiliated to the National FFS network.
2. Share farming and seeds production concerns with the national authorities for advisory support.
3. Collect views of small-scale farmers and liaise with national and Local Government leaders to listen to its members.
4. Create platforms for members to actively speak with their leaders on issues that affect them.
5. Arrange for national and local leaders visits to FFS group plots, seeds stores and community seed banks in Uganda.
6. Organise for seeds fairs at national and district levels and ensure stakeholders participation in the engagements.
7. Advocate for national and Local Government authorities to allocate resources/budgets to support the FFS activities.
8. Ensure that national and District Local Government authorities assign technical staff to support FFS groups and their activities.
9. Ensure its members participate in government budgets consultations during every financial year.

## REGISTRATION OF THE DISTRICT FFS NETWORKS WITH THE DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In a bid to support the official establishment of the FFS Networks, the SD=HS project supported the development of a Constitution for the Networks and the development of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that was signed with the respective District Local Governments (DLG). This contributed to building a great working relationship with the District Local Governments and led to the involvement of the DLG in the FFS Network activities and buy-in for them in the institutionalization of the Farmer Field School approach.

ESAFF Uganda supported the establishment and registration of the FFS Networks in Apac, Adjumani, Amuria, Soroti, Nebbi and Omoro districts and are now operational with their different FFS network activities in accordance with their plans though still extending to other districts. Despite the fact that other districts have completed the registration processes, there is a need to formalize the FFS Networks in other districts in Uganda. Farmer Field School members in other districts need to be supported to develop Constitutions and hold their meetings as they prepare to register their FFS Networks.

## LINKAGE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL FFS NETWORK AND THE DISTRICT FFS NETWORKS

The District FFS Networks are part of the National FFS Network which is hosted by Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF) Uganda. The National FFS Network brings together District FFS Networks whose members are Farmers Field Schools at the district level.

## LINKAGE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL FFS NETWORK AND THE EAST AFRICAN FIELD SCHOOLS

The National FFS Network is a member of the East African Field Schools that supports the scaling-up and the institutionalization of the FFS methodology, policy dialogue and advocacy, enhancing the quality of the FFS learning process, spearhead knowledge sharing and dissemination among member countries, accrediting and validating trainers, partnerships, resource mobilization and monitoring and evaluation of FFS activities. The East African Field Schools Network is actively operational in eleven member countries including Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

## MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL FFS NETWORK

The management of the National FFS Network is done by the selected committee which consists of the National Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, General Secretary, Treasurer and Members. They are referred to as the **"elected officers or members"** and any other members who may be elected in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of the network. The National FFS Network committee is composed of representatives from the different districts that are elected to oversee the operations of the network in Uganda.

## WAY FORWARD

As the FFS groups and networks grow and keep increasing, there are increasing plans and activities. The National FFS Network plans have successfully shown that FFS networks are an effective way of organizing and empowering small-scale farmers with common intentions and motives. This has led to an increased engagement with the District Local Government and increased their access to social services. However, mechanisms for facilitating engagements and delivery of social services are still weak within the National FFS network. As these networks develop and take on more complex initiatives, there is a need for more attention to capacity building of the National FFS Network members in line with marketing, fundraising and financial management among others.

There is also the need for the National FFS Network members to access and use information and communication tools in their FFS Network activities at all levels. More investments in training and equipping the National FFS network with the relevant information and communication technology will bridge the information gap and enhance the diversification of business opportunities and improve the efficiency of transactions among the network members. Documentation of the lessons learnt and other network activities are also needed as it will scale up the process of building National FFS network in Uganda.



### OTHER SD=HS PARTNERS:



## Brief about ESAFF Uganda

Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF) Uganda is the largest small -scale farmer-led advocacy movement in Uganda formed in 2002 to facilitate processes through which small scale farmers ' development concerns can be solicited, articulated and ultimately addressed through policies and programs. ESAFF Uganda currently has a membership in 54 districts. ESAFF Uganda is also part of a bigger network of small -scale farmers in the other 15 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

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