

Building farmer organisations' capacity to collectively adopt agroforestry and sustainable agriculture land management practices in Lake Victoria Basin

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Key messages

- ▶ Agroforestry and sustainable agriculture land management are feasible approaches for combating the impacts of climate change on smallholder farming systems.
- ▶ Building capacity and collective farmer organization structures are key in enabling women to participate in sustainable agriculture practices.

Introduction

Between 2012 and 2017, Vi Agroforestry and partners supported the development and implementation of the Lake Victoria Farmers' Organisation Agroforestry (FOA) program. Under this program, and in cooperation with 40 member-based farmer organizations spread across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, approximately two million female and male farmers, school children and young people were mobilized to implement agroforestry and sustainable agriculture land management (SALM) practices in different agroecosystems of Lake Victoria catchment areas. The region had experienced land degradation due to deforestation, inefficient agricultural practices, uncontrolled grazing and soil erosion. With limited knowledge and access to services for natural resource management, farmers were experiencing severe reductions in crop yields and milk production; it was evident the fragile ecosystem could no longer support community needs. There was an urgent need to reverse the adverse effects of land degradation and to restore ecosystem balance so as to support climate change resilient communities

Box 1. Vi Agroforestry is a Swedish NGO that has supported farmers and farmer organizations in East Africa since 1983, to collectively adopt agroforestry and sustainable agriculture land management (SALM) practices. SALM is a methodology which enables farmers to adapt to the impacts of climate change; thereby reducing greenhouse gases and increasing farm productivity and food production. SALM approaches include green gardening, agronomic practices, renewable energy solutions, water and waste management. Intervention measures include nutrition management, including mulching and composting, soil and water conservation, crop rotation and intercropping, agroforestry, land restoration, tillage and residue management, integrated livestock management and integrated pest management.

and enhanced sustainable energy and food supply, while reducing the pressure on natural resources for current and future generations.

While communities in the region are typically patriarchal with key productive resources such as land under the ownership and control of men, the depletion of shared resources such as land affects both women and men. When access and control over resources is mediated by spouses, fathers or clan leaders, women are typically disadvantaged and hindered in the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. At the same time, women are heavily involved in farming-related activities such as bush clearing, tilling, planting, weeding and harvesting. Beyond resource access, women have limited decision-making power over resource use, production and benefits. This lack of involvement, combined with lack of knowledge on modern farming techniques, and general disregard for women's accumulated indigenous knowledge, can have serious negative consequences for the environment.

The Lake Victoria Farmers' Organisation Agroforestry (FOA) program

The main purpose of this program was to help farmers restore degraded land for improved livelihoods. This initiative aimed to provide adequate support, both financial and non-financial. With the knowledge that access to finance is key for farmers (especially women) to sustain necessary investments into land productivity, the Village Savings and Loaning (VSL) financial model was promoted to enhance farmers' access to affordable financial services.

Addressing the concerns of both women and men is important for restoring land, improving food security and embracing alternative income streams. Under the program, partner organizations also adopted a collective approach to governance so as to address any social issues compromising sustainable land use practices, such as women being broadly underrepresented in farmer organizations and consequently having little say in decision making. Strengthening farmer organizations' governance capacities and mainstreaming gender into their activities was a core strategy; this enabled both women and men to participate in decision making, thereby improving democracy and transparency. Farmer organizations had to adhere to clearly



A. Marie Claire Kabaganwa from Rwanda. Photo by Elin Larsson; **B. Beatrice Mukakizima from Rwanda.** Photo by Elin Larsson; **C. Regina Nsabiman from Uganda.** Photo by Edward Echwalu; **D. The lower right: Winnie Nakavuma and her son Calton from Uganda.** Photo by Elin Larsson.



A. Samson Ochieng and his bee-farm. Photo by Elin Larsson; **B. Podocarpus usambarensis an agroforestry tree.** Photo by Elin Larsson; **C. Vegetables in a multi-storey garden.** Photo by Linda Andersson.

defined rules and regulations to govern their affairs. A scorecard was introduced that helped partners improve their governance systems; this included gender-related aspects such as leadership, employment and gender balance. Establishing gender-sensitive management practices at board and management levels ensures the approach has a trickle-down effect to lower levels.

Major results of the FOA program

Key among improvements seen through the FOA program was that farmer organizations managed to hold Annual General Meetings (AGMs), which was not previously the norm. Likewise, there has been a significant change in attitude among farmer organizations with regards to gender, as evident from deliberate efforts seen to involve women more actively in decision-making. The percentage of women in farmer organizations boards and management positions increased from 8% to 42% and financial resources allocated to women increased from 41% to 52%. This saw a gradual incorporation of **women's** voices, skills and knowledge into agroforestry-related discussions

and decisions within their organizations and communities; their interests and concerns are gradually being taken into consideration.

Women's access to financial services enabled them to acquire farm inputs and increase their farms' productivity significantly. Coupled with access to market information, this provided an opportunity for women to sell surplus produce as an alternative income stream. The additional earnings were used to supplement household income and meet other needs such as healthcare or education. 104,520 households were able to increase and diversify their crop production; this is mainly attributed to the involvement of women in farming and the use of modern farming techniques. Overall, the program contributed to a 50 % per hectare yields increase among households implementing the SALM and agroforestry practices.

One of the program's key ecological achievements is the considerable reduction of soil erosion; the inclusive leadership and management approach and access to additional financial resources helped farmers take steps to reconstruct and rehabilitate important soil structures. This high individual and communal responsibility towards soil protection is illustrated by a total of 100,164 households actively reconstructing soil structures.

Lessons learnt

To increase women's participation in agroforestry and SALM adoption, there is need for stable access to and control of land if they are to optimize the long-term benefits accrued from these practices.

- Societal traditional and cultural norms, such as land inheritance for women, take time to change.
- For meaningful participation and full realization of benefits, women need to have access to economic and financial resources, capacity, market linkages and information. This should be considered when designing, planning and implementing projects or programs.
- For women to fully participate in decisions and management, it is key to strengthen their leadership capacities through training, mentorship and coaching.
- Approaches aimed at fostering collaboration and joint decision-making among women and men provide great opportunities to address communal challenges that compromise sustainable land management.
- Communities often need to be able to see a problem from their perspective before they are able to accept a change in their norms. For this to happen there is need for capacity building and exposure to good practices that have succeeded elsewhere, to ignite self-reflection.

Website: www.viagroforestry.org

About this brief series: Lessons for gender-responsive landscape restoration

Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) aims to achieve ecological integrity and enhance human well-being in deforested or degraded landscapes. Evidence shows that addressing gender equality and women's rights is critical for addressing this dual objective. Against this backdrop, CIFOR and a number of partners hosted a Global Landscapes Forum workshop on FLR and gender equality in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2017. The objective of the workshop was to identify and discuss experiences, opportunities and challenges to advancing gender-responsive FLR in East African countries, as well as to join together various stakeholders working at the interface of gender and FLR as a community of practice. This brief set is a tangible outcome of this collaboration, featuring a number of useful lessons and recommendations rooted in the experience and expertise of partners in civil society, multilateral organizations, research community and private sector – all working in different ways to enhance the gender-responsiveness of restoration efforts.

The Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) is the world's largest knowledge-led multi-sectoral platform for integrated land use, bringing together world leaders, scientists, private sector representatives, farmers and community leaders and civil society to accelerate action towards the creation of more resilient, equitable, profitable, and climate-friendly landscapes.



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