

Animal Husbandry Training for Farmer Field Schools in Teso, Lango & Acholi Regions – A Report on Follow-up Activities

Executive Summary

In the months of March and April 2009, follow up activities for the training of farmers in Animal Husbandry from Teso, Lango and Acholi regions were conducted.

Activities included a training of trainers (ToT) and field monitoring visits.

The objectives of the follow-up were:

- To acquaint participants (would be trainers) with the training guide on animal husbandry
- To create and strengthen a pool of community based trainers in animal husbandry
- To give hands-on technical support to the farmers with the action plans drawn up during the training
- To encourage those farmers who may have become reluctant to adopt some of the good animal husbandry practices.

The Training of Trainers attracted 29 participants out of the expected 30. Only one was a woman. The training was facilitated by Ms. Everse M.I Ruhindi from PENHA and Dr. Tom Ogwal, the district veterinary officer for Oyam district. Also present was Andrew Atingi, the Farmer Field Schools assistant from Soroti.

Discussions mainly focused on internalizing the training guide, getting tips on how to conduct adult training and strategies on how to implement animal husbandry projects after the training. The following way forward was proposed:

- Trainers would introduce themselves to the local leaders and officials and sensitise them about the proposed activities while asking them for a hand in mobilizing communities.
- Request the community development officers to mobilize the farmers that are not members of Farmer Field Schools (FFS).
- Start working with the FFS executive members where FFS have already been established, then request the executive members to sensitise their respective members.
- Sensitisation of local council officials who are part of the FFS networks would be done.
- Identify categories of interested and/or potential farmers based on the animals they work with. This should be helpful in enabling the trainers to target the right people for the right topic.
- Trainers from Kitgum should try to link their visits with those of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) staff and go with them to the field. The FAO staff would leave them in one area doing the sensitisation and pick them up on their way back home.
- Since transport to very distant places is a problem, some of the trainers should start with the sub-counties that have been represented because they are able to ride bicycles within their respective sub-counties. Sensitisation would also be done during the sub-county network monthly meetings.
- Attempts would be made to work with the district production officers and use their motorcycles or vehicles. The only challenge with this is that they would require money for fuel. If it was possible, FAO could make available the fuel.
- It will be important to give the report on this training and reports of subsequent sensitization sessions to the sub-county authorities.

In respect of the field monitoring visits, people could be seen struggling to make progress, and conditions are still tough. The following is a summary of observations made:

- One of the things that the farmers took very seriously during the training was the need to house animals. Almost everybody had put the construction of an animal house in the action plan. This is being implemented – ranging from grass thatched to iron sheets roofs. The only challenge is getting the feeds for animals once they are housed. Most people in these regions are just going back to their original homes and are not in a position to buy feeds. The alternative of planting feed crops would be less expensive and more sustainable, but that also takes more time, and people are just starting to plant in their gardens. In light of this, most animals are still being managed by the free range system.
- Farmers have a misconception that only exotic breeds are good enough, despite the emphasis on the potential of local breeds during the training. When asked how many chickens a person has, he or she is quick to say “*I don't have [any], I only have our local chickens!*”
- Different sub-counties in different districts are at different levels of accessing government services. There are some sub-counties that have no sub-county veterinary staff. This problem was mainly attributed to the District Service Commission and also the Ministry of Public Service (MPC). The District Service Commission has failed to recruit staff because there is no money at the district to pay for the sitting allowances for the members of the Commission and where the MPC is concerned, the number of paid staff allowed is not equal to the number of staff required at sub-county level.
- There seems to have been a problem in demarcating districts and the sub-counties that should belong to a respective district. Some sub-counties are extremely far from their respective district headquarters, yet very close to a neighbouring district of which they are not part .
- The farmers lack skills of strategic planning in the way they plan and carry out their projects. A case in point is when a group decides to buy 20 female goats, with an objective of cross breeding, but forget to think about buying an improved male goat. Another case is where an implementing agency gives 10 male goats without any females and the FFS members don't seriously question that.
- In almost all these districts where farmers are keeping cattle that are not for ploughing, they leave the cows with a herdsman to take charge of them and he takes all the milk as his salary or wages, leaving the owners of the cows with no milk. The main question as far as training farmers is concerned therefore becomes; ‘*Should we target the owners of the cows in the training or the herdsmen, since the owners have very little to do with the management of the cows?*’
- There have been many challenges in keeping animals in the camps. One of the reasons was that people's incomes were very low and they could not afford to buy feeds for the animals to be able to keep them in the houses. As a result, people simply leave the animals to roam around looking for feeds. With this type of management, the animals are liable to contract diseases and may even be stolen by other people in the camps.
- The people trained have been over zealous on controlling ticks and they are even spraying beyond the recommended frequency. This they say is because currently there are too many ticks, but when the number of ticks is reduced to a certain level, they will start following the recommended frequency.

- Though the training was very useful and practical, and trainees are trying to practice some of the skills acquired, there is still need for placement of some of the trainees to get more hands-on experience. This is evidenced by the Amuria group, which was very interested in programmed hatching but still felt that they needed someone who has been doing it over a long period of time to help them.
- Looking at group dynamics, it is very difficult to find groups where members have the same interests and priorities. The question therefore is, *“How can we strike a balance between different or competing individual interests within one FFS?”*
- Some of the District Veterinary Officers (DVO) take the need to help farmers increase their animal production seriously. For example in Apac, the DVO had planned a programme in one of the sub-counties to show farmers how to drench pigs and disinfect animal houses. This was to be done at the farm of one of the major pig farmers. All interested people, especially those who own pigs, had been invited. In this district, the DVO is putting a lot of emphasis on piggery because of the high returns. Further, in Oyam district, the DVO has given farmers an incentive, promising that he will provide vaccines for the “newcastle” disease for anyone who keeps more than 100 chickens, even though the government has stopped giving free vaccines.
- The issue of record keeping is still not being taken seriously by more than 95% of the trainees who were visited. This is simply a question of established mindsets.
- Pader district needs a lot of support. It is doing worse than all the other districts in the region.

Conclusion

The knowledge and skills acquired from the training have been spread to many more people in the communities. Though we cannot get the actual numbers because of the weakness in documentation and record keeping by the trainees, we can confidently say that a lot of useful work has been done.

Most of the people who were trained are trying to implement a few things, though the conditions are still not very favourable. Most people are only just getting back to their original homes, following years of war and insecurity, and need some time to settle and put things in order.

There is value in intensifying follow-up and monitoring while working closely with the district staff. In addition, Sub-county Networks should compile an inventory of who owns what asset (especially those that have an impact on increasing productivity) and circulate it widely.