The Eastern Africa Field Schools Support Hub is officially launched

The Eastern Africa Field Schools Support Hub has officially been launched in a colorful event held at the Entebbe Botanical Beach Hotel on 30th May 2018.

The launch was attended by key Field Schools delegates including Permanent Secretaries, Directors of Extension, International Agencies/Institutions, Academia, Farmer representatives and members of the Private Sector from Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania.

While officially launching the Hub, the Director of extension from the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry & Fisheries in Uganda, Mrs. Beatrice Byarugaba, said this comes at a time when the ministry has rolled out a policy where Farmer Field Schools is one of the acknowledged tools of implementation.

"Now that extension services have been revived, there are challenges of working methodologies and knowledge. Knowledge is there but how to manage it and promote it is a challenge. I am glad the Support Hub is going to intervene and promote knowledge sharing," she said.

Since the introduction of the Field Schools approach in the 90s, thousands of Field Schools have been implemented throughout East Africa and Africa at large.

However, as the approach becomes more popular, new issues and challenges keep arising, which could threaten quality of Field Schools activities especially in the East African region.

Amongst the challenges is how to maintain the quality of FS implementation while scaling up, how to ensure networking and learning amongst Field School actors and ensuring links between field level practice and policy and strategic development.

In response to these challenges and more, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) supported the start-up of the Eastern Africa Field Schools Support Hub which was currently being hosted by the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAS), in Kampala, Uganda.

According to the Hub Coordinator, Mr. Max Olupot who is also the Learning and Partnerships officer at AFAAS, it has been established based on experience from the rapid expansion of the Field Schools approach in the Eastern Africa sub-region, accompanied with increasing demand for knowledge management, sharing and quality control.

"The Hub will strengthen knowledge management and provide catalytic support for improved quality of Field Schools interventions," Mr. Olupot said.

The hub will support the up-scaling and institutionalization of the Field Schools methodology, policy dialogue and advocacy, contribute to enhanced quality of the Field Schools learning process, spearhead knowledge sharing and dissemination amongst member countries, accredit and validate trainers, partnerships and resource mobilization and monitoring and evaluation of Field Schools activities.

The Hub will be actively operational in all its member countries; Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania.
Message from the Support Hub Coordinator

Dear partners, colleagues and friends,

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for joining us at the official launch of the Eastern Africa Field Schools Support Hub on May 30, 2018. It was great milestone in the Field Schools Fraternity. We are delighted for the chance to provide leadership in the Eastern Africa Support Hub. Your contribution towards shaping the agenda set to improve the quality of Field Schools implementation in the region cannot be overemphasized. We continue to count on your advice, expert opinions and sharing lessons learned to help us collectively build a sustainable network for our common good.

The Field Schools approach has increasingly become popular in East Africa. Some countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda have institutionalized Field Schools, similarly, the FS approach has been integrated in National Agricultural Extension policies and programmes as a tool of extension.

However, new issues and challenges with regard to the quality of Field Schools including the implementation are emerging and thus need to be holistically addressed. Such issues include; maintaining the quality of Field Schools implementation while scaling up, ensuring networking and learning amongst Field School actors and forging links between field level practice, policy and strategic development. It is against this background, that the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) supported the start-up of the Eastern Africa Field Schools Support Hub which is being hosted by the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), in Kampala, Uganda.

The role of the hub will be to facilitate knowledge generation and sharing across actors in the sub-region, providing catalytic support to countries and actors for enhanced quality of Field Schools interventions, providing strategic guidance and leadership for the implementation of Field Schools and also providing technical input and support in technical content areas of Field Schools including manuals and guidelines and actively.

The Hub’s agenda is an agenda for all Field Schools actors. It is for extension workers, farmers, Academia, implementing NGOs, Government and every stakeholder who is concerned or affected by Field Schools. Together, we can deliver the change needed to improve the quality of Field Schools implementation.

We appreciate the strong engagement with multi-stakeholders and in enhancing our engagement we have created a number of platforms for continue sharing. We invite you to make use of these.

Max Olupot
Support Hub staff participate in Field Schools facilitators and trainers training on managing the Fall Army Worm

Staff of the Eastern Africa Field Schools Support Hub together with facilitators and trainers of Farmer Field Schools have undergone a refresher training to impart them with more knowledge and skills to fight against the Fall Army Worm (FAW).

The training was held in Kenya in Nyeri County between April 23rd to 27th attracting participants from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, The Gambia, Somalia and Ethiopia.

This training was supported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) which is working through the Field Schools approach to encourage the effective implementation of the Integrated Pest Management method for FAW management within the East African Region.

According the Support Hub officer, Edwin Adenya, the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach provides a platform at community level for putting in practice farmer-driven and participatory advisory services linking technology innovation with indigenous knowledge to enhance food security of vulnerable communities.

“Farmer education and community action are very critical elements in managing the Fall Army worm (FAW) within the East Africa region. That is why it is important that the people who reach out to them are constantly equipped with new knowledge and skills to help them tackle the FAW which is a big threat to their livelihood,” he said.

Core to the training was fine-tuning the Farmer Field Schools Curricula to integrate management of the FAW and development a plan for implementation in the participants’ various countries of operation.

Participants also learnt about the role of extension workers and Farmer Field Schools in the management of the Fall Army Worm, how to integrate FAW management within the maize calendar, identifying the FAW and its natural enemies, how to use the FAMEWS mobile App to collect data critical for the management of the FAW and alternative FAW management options.

Each of the participants were given a guide titled, Integrated Management of the Fall Army Worm on Maize, developed by FAO to aid Farmer Field Schools facilitators in Africa in the control of the FAW.

ADRA Sudan is implementing 73 Field Schools in the West Darfur region. The schools are being implemented in Aishbara, Adar, Hajar, Zagawa, Um Sibaikha, Kindidbi, Bilibi, Murhaka, Taibya, Daliaba, Bab Al Janan, Ammar and Jadid.

The Field Schools are aims at sensitizing farmers on how to manage their farms by themselves, effectively communicate with other farmers and stakeholders, make informed decisions and take responsibility to implement those decisions.

Through these Field Schools, demonstrations have been set up to teach the farmers how to grow peanuts, maize, sesame, millet, tomatoes, onions, cucumber and other vegetables.

ADRA also conducts trainings for agricultural supervisors and extension workers on fertilizer manufacturing, animal health and nutrition and animal husbandry.

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Dan Batanda is a farmer from Ngoma Sub-County found in Nakaseke District in Central Uganda. He is a member of Umubano Good Luck Farmer Field School found in Ngoma Town Council in Nakaseke District.

Umubano has been in existence for 5 years now and is one of the strongest FFS group in the district and neighboring towns. It is comprised of members from a network of 22 Field Schools from Ngoma Town Council and Ngoma Sub-County.

Here is his story that he shared at the official launch of the Support Hub about how the Farmer Field Schools have helped them.

“We started as a small group during the time farming system was the local system that united farmers.

When we were introduced to the farmer Field Schools method through a FAO project, some of us embraced it but others did not; though they are now showing interest and voluntarily asking to join.

We began with only 8 member but have now grown to 45 members. We went a step ahead to register our group at Sub-County and District Level, we even have a certificate.

Umubano has helped us in such a way that we now have a voice in the area. We benefit a lot from Operation Wealth Creation.

We are amongst the first groups considered when distributing banana suckers, cassava, cuttings, etc. (Operation Wealth Creation is a project under the ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs in Uganda which helps in improving household incomes by facilitating commercial agricultural production)

As a group, we understood that climate change is for real and we started devising means of how to adapt to it. For instance, Nakaseke has more pastoralists than crop farmers and through the Field Schools, we are now discussing alternative options of farming and pasturing. Most pastoralists have now embraced the cultivation of crops due to interventions from the group.

We also integrated lessons on saving in the group and we have been saving for the past 4 years.

When we started off with the eight members, we saved up to 15 million Shillings as a group but have now grown up to 68 million Shillings.
Using the FAMWES Mobile App collect data on FAW infestations and damage

Endowed with rich physical features like Mount Kenya, the Aberdare Mountains and great weather, Nyeri County located in the Central region of Kenya is one of the regions in the country where agribusiness is one of the main economic activities.

Amongst the many farmers in the region is Duncan Kabungo, who is currently growing maize on 26 acres.

Kabungo was visited by participants in a training conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) on integrated management of the Fall Army Worm (FAW) on maize.

The purpose of this visit was for the participants to see how they can use the Fall Armyworm Monitoring and Early Warning System (FAMEWS) mobile app developed by FAO to fight the FAW scourge.

On the outside, Kabungo’s farm looked very healthy; much to the admiration of the participants.

However, on entering the field to make further observation on the health of the maize, participants noticed a major outbreak of the Fall Army Worm which the farmer was ignorant about.

When asked whether he knew about the FAW, Kabungo said, “I have heard of the Fall Army Worm but I have not seen it on my field. I have seen some pests but they are not a danger”.

He was sure his farm had survived the FAW infestation. Kabungo was a representation of a number of farmers who suffer the risk of their farms being infested by FAW with no knowledge of how to recognize it or control it.

Luckily for Kabungo, he received advice from the participants on how to manage the pest and they also gave him advice on how he can manage the pest and also shared precautionary measures he should take to try to prevent or reduce the chances of another FAW infestation on his next planting.

The participants then went ahead to collect data using the App. The data collected reflected the extent of the damage, the growth stage of the maize, geographical location, size of the field just to mention.

The FAMEWS App is a monitoring and education tool that collects data via smart phones. The App provides information on infested crop plants.

The FAMEWS app is being used to build collective knowledge on the FAW in Africa to create a better understanding of how and where it spreads and what makes it weaker and less damaging.

The data goes to a national platform, where National Focal Points review and approve the data. Then the data flows to a global platform, where decision makers can review the data to set priorities and researchers can use the data to better understand the FAW’s ecology in Africa, permitting larger-scale and longer-term decision-making.

The application is open to use by all authorized users and the data will be freely available for use by farmers, associations, extension workers, government officials and donors.

To download this app, type; bit.ly/2FKraru or visit www.fao.org.

For any inquiries or to share information about the Field School activities you are implementing, or are being implemented in your area, send us an email on eafieldschools@gmail.com
How smallholder farms can sustainably manage the Fall Army Worm

Millions of farmers in East Africa today are facing the threat of the Fall Army Worm (FAW) presently in Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Ethiopia and Rwanda.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations Organisation, (FAO), the FAW was first detected in the Central and Western parts of Africa in early 2016 and is now reported in almost all of Sub-Saharan Africa except Djibouti, Eritrea and Lesotho.

As such, FAO developed a guide titled, “Integrated Management of the Fall Armyworm on Maize” which details methods farmers can use to sustainably manage the FAW.

By using high quality seeds, farmers are in position to manage the level of damage the FAW could have on their maize since good pest management is dependent on healthy seeds. High quality seeds tend to germinate well and are disease free.

Late planting or staggered planting i.e. plots with maize at different stages is one of the factors that increase FAW infestations because when looking for where to lay its eggs, the female moth i.e. adult FAW is attracted to the last planted maize on the plot.

Farmers should therefore ensure all plots are at the same growth stage to help manage the FAW.

Plant diversity or mixed farming if fully embraced by farmers as a management method, goes a long way in managing the FAW. Maize mixed in plots with cassava, yams or any other crops tends to be less attractive to the Female moth which lays eggs.

Plant diversity also helps to increase the population of farmers’ friends i.e. predators like ants and parasitoids like wasps which feed on the FAW eggs and larvae.

The push and pull method which also helps in managing the FAW is only attainable through mixed farming. It works in such a way that within the plant diversity, some of the plants pull the moth to themselves or push them away hence limiting the damage it could cause to the maize.

To attain this, a farmer is advised to plant alongside the maize, Desmodium and grasses like Napier. Desmodium planted in-between the rows of maize acts as a repellent which pushes the moth away while wild grasses like Napier planted around the maize field attracts the moths, pulling them to their side hence managing the level of infestation of the FAW on the maize.

Most farmers also fail to manage the FAW because they rarely visit their farms to see the health of their crops. Constant monitoring of one’s garden either weekly or every three to four days helps farmers to observe what is happening to their maize and thus after take the appropriate action.

While monitoring the garden, it is important that farmers look out for the general health of the maize i.e. if they have a nice green color which indicates good nutrition, or if they appear moisture stressed or if there are signs of damage from the FAW or other pests and diseases.

Small holder farmers have reported successful use of local methods such as soil, ash, sand, lime, salt, oil, hot pepper, neem etc other than pesticides to control FAW.

For more information on integrated management of the Fall Army Worm, visit http://www.fao.org/3/i8665en/i8665en.pdf.

Sudan Says Field Schools started there

The origin of the Farmer Field Schools approach dates as far back as 1989, when the first wave of Farmer Field Schools was conducted in the rice fields of Indonesia.

However, during a visit to Sudan in May, the Eastern Africa Field Schools Support Hub learnt that Sudan carries a different belief, they are convinced Sudan was the first Country in which Farmer Field Schools (FFS) were rolled out as far back as 1978 as an extension tool.

According to the Sudan Director General of Agriculture Extension in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr. Elamien Hassan Elamin Mohammed, the FFS tool of extension was later integrated as an IPM approach between 1993-1994.

Besides this interesting piece of information, the Support Hub also witnessed that Sudan is making great strides in institutionalizing the Field Schools methodology.
Vision:
Farmers and agro-pastoralists transforming their livelihoods.

Mission:
A center of excellence for Field Schools implementation and quality control.

Objectives:
To strengthen FS knowledge management;
To establish the FS technical support system;
To strengthen and promote institutional partnerships and linkages;
To contribute and promote policy engagement and advocacy among actors.

Our Mandate:
Support up-scaling and Institutionalization of the FS methodology;
Policy dialogue and advocacy;
Contribute to enhanced quality of the FS learning process;
Knowledge sharing and dissemination;
Accreditation and validation of trainers;
Partnerships and resource mobilization;
Monitoring and evaluation.