

Uganda Baseline Report Summary (Nov 2024): **Scaling Up Farmer Field and Business Schools in Coffee Communities**

Executive Summary

This report presents the key findings of a benchmarking assessment of the **Scaling Up Farmer Field and Business Schools in Coffee Communities** (SUFFBS-C) project, which aims to advance gender-equitable economic empowerment for 4,000 women farmers and their households in coffee-growing communities in the Rwenzori subregion. The project has four expected outcomes: (1) Increased women and girls' access to and control over productive resources; (2) enhanced positive gender and social norms; (3) alternative livelihood options and inclusive markets; and (4) strengthened voice and leadership capacities of women farmers, women's rights organizations (WROs), and women's leadership organizations (WLOs) to advocate for gender-equitable agricultural productivity and decision-making.

The baseline study assessed resource access, innovative practices, and the impact of training, involving 389 respondents (79% female) with an average age of 45. The study had a high response rate of 95% – with a majority having a primary education (59%). Most households, headed by men (77%), consist of six members and engage in subsistence farming (54%).

Key findings include:

Significantly increased access to productive resources, with 78% of women having access to financial services, and 74% having secure land use rights, while only 10% have access to credit. The **use of digital financial services for agricultural purposes is low** (36%). In tandem significant work is needed to enhance legal documentation and awareness regarding land rights. The assessment also highlights gaps in the adoption of new agricultural practices, with **69% of respondents not adopting new methods despite occasional participation in training**. While **nutritional awareness is high (83%)**, with women incorporating foods from multiple food groups to meet minimum dietary diversity, although **the adoption of diverse diets remains limited**. Furthermore, **although 75% of women engage in alternative livelihoods, particularly crop farming other than coffee, a notable 74% have not received related training**. About **78% of women farmers have access to digital integration services**, such as mobile money.

These findings resonate with those of the Social Norm Exploratory Analysis, which reveals that deeply rooted social and gender norms greatly influence women's access to and control over productive resources in the coffee-growing communities of Kyenjojo and Rubirizi. These **norms surrounding land ownership, financial control, and decision-making create substantial barriers for women, shaping their interactions with men and overall behaviors**. Intersecting factors such as age, economic status, location, and marital status also shape these norms. The analysis finds that **married women face more barriers than unmarried women or widows**, as it is often easier for the latter to buy or inherit land. In contrast, married women typically cannot purchase land in their own names if local authorities are aware of their marital status.

The baseline study also highlights **ongoing challenges in building women's leadership capacities, with only 22% of women having received leadership training** and still have difficulties in using digital financial services, adopting agricultural practices, and developing leadership skills. **Persistent gender disparities in access to resources, financial services, and decision-making continue to constrain women farmers' economic potential**.

Introduction

CARE International in Uganda, a leading humanitarian organization, is dedicated to fighting poverty and social injustice, with a special emphasis on investing in women and girls. This approach is based on more than six decades of experience, showing that promoting gender equality benefits entire communities. Funded by the Starbucks Foundation and in partnership with CARE USA and Joint Effort to Save Environment (JESE), CARE International in Uganda is implementing the **Scaling up Farmer Field and Business School in Coffee Communities** (SUFFBS-C) project from 2023 to 2025 in the southwestern districts of Kyenjojo and Rubirizi. The project aims to advance gender-equitable economic empowerment for **4,000 women farmers and their households** in coffee-growing communities in the Rwenzori subregion. This project targets not only women farmers but also their households, **563 community structures, and approximately 35,000 community members living in these districts.**

The project has **four key expected outcomes**: (1) Increased access to and control over productive resources for women and girls; (2) enhanced positive gender and social norms; (3) expanded alternative livelihood options and inclusive markets; and (4) strengthened voice and leadership capacities of women farmers, WROs, and WLOs to advocate for gender-equitable agricultural productivity and decision-making.

This initiative is structured around **four key objectives**. **Objective 1 focuses on empowering women through financial and digital literacy by using CARE's Village Savings and Loan (VSLA) methodology and digital applications** such as Chomoka and digital sub-wallets. It also promotes land rights and facilitates household reflection dialogues, primarily between men and their spouses, with the involvement of community leaders. Additionally, linkages are created to connect women groups with financial institutions, networks, and government programs.

Objective 2 addresses re-envisioning gender norms and enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability, beginning with a formative study and gender analysis to identify positive and negative gender norms in relation to agricultural productivity, nutrition, and sustainability. Gender dialogues, kitchen campaigns, and nutrition-sensitive agricultural practices are promoted through training, demonstrations, and the establishment of nutrition-sensitive demonstration sites to foster behavior change. The desired behavior change involves promoting gender-equitable decision-making in agriculture, improving women's access to resources, and encouraging households to adopt sustainable farming and diverse nutrition practices.

Objective 3 focuses on business development and entrepreneurial skills for women farmers. Women's groups are trained in selection planning management (SPM), business skills, and entrepreneurship, with community-based trainers cascading these sessions in their areas. Young women apprentices are supported with short-term skills training and start-up kits. The objective also aims to connect women entrepreneurs to private-sector actors through market linkage meetings and participation in market platforms at various levels.

Finally, **Objective 4 is centered on leadership and mentorship.** Women mentors are trained in leadership, communication, and soft skills, and are tasked with conducting mentorship and coaching sessions for women leaders. Additionally, grassroots women's structures receive tailored grants to engage with stakeholders on land access and utilization, further strengthening their leadership and advocacy efforts.

Purpose of the Baseline Study

The baseline study for the SUFFBS-C project aimed to establish initial values for key indicators of impact and outcomes to measure the project's progress and effects over time. This study provides critical data on the current conditions and challenges experienced by women farmers in coffee-growing communities, particularly regarding their access to resources, adoption of agricultural practices, and socio-economic empowerment.

The baseline and evaluation align with CARE International's Evaluation Policy and guidelines and served three critical purposes:

1. **Establishing a baseline** – the initial conditions in the target communities concerning the project indicators prior to implementation. This baseline data serves as a benchmark against which progress, and impact are measured throughout the project lifecycle.
2. **Guiding implementation strategies** – to understand the existing situation regarding women farmers' access to resources, knowledge, and leadership opportunities so the project team can tailor interventions to effectively address specific needs and challenges faced by the target population.
3. **Ensuring consistent impact measurement** – to establish a robust set of measures that subsequent monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) milestones will follow, ensuring consistent and comparable impact measurement over time.

Methodology: Design and Approach

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches such as surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs) to thoroughly understand the target population and context. Quantitative data focused on demographic trends, resource access, and training participation, while qualitative methods explored social norms and women's experiences. Data collection adhered to ethical standards, with enumerators trained in confidentiality and cultural sensitivity. The absence of direct income data limited economic impact analysis. Perceived income changes introduced potential biases, and logistical challenges in remote areas may have caused sampling gaps. Despite these limitations, rigorous protocols ensured data quality and reliability.

Results

The baseline findings shed light on resource accessibility, adoption of innovative approaches, participation in decision-making, and the impact of training and support programs on enhancing agricultural productivity and socio-economic empowerment. Through a structured examination of these variables, we aim to provide insights that can inform strategies for promoting gender equality, improving livelihoods, and fostering sustainable development in rural settings.

- **Demographic and Household Characteristics:** The demographic profile of respondents reveals a predominantly female participation (794%), with an average age of 45 years. The largest portion of respondents fall within the middle-age range of 36-55. A significant proportion of these women are engaged in subsistence farming, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to transition to commercial agriculture. In terms of educational attainment, 59% of participants have only primary education and 24% have no formal

education altogether. Households were generally male headed (77%) and had an average size of six members, emphasizing traditional family structures.

- **Access to Resources:** Access to financial resources showed some progress, with 78% of women reporting involvement in financial tools like VSLAs. However, access to credit remained a significant barrier, with only 10% able to secure loans. Land rights were reported as secure by 74% of respondents, but gaps in formal documentation and ownership persist, creating vulnerabilities for women. The study also found that while 78% of participants utilized digital financial services such as mobile money, their application to agricultural purposes was minimal, reflecting a need for enhanced digital literacy and infrastructure.
- **Gender Norms and Leadership:** Social and cultural norms posed significant challenges to women's economic empowerment. Traditional views on land ownership and decision-making often sidelined women, especially in married households. Leadership training opportunities were scarce, with only 22% of women participating in such programs. This lack of leadership development has limited women's ability to advocate for gender-equitable practices and assume influential roles within their communities.
- **Agricultural Practices and Nutrition:** Adoption of innovative agricultural practices remained low, with 69% of respondents indicating they had not incorporated new methods. Despite this, nutritional awareness was relatively high, with 83% of participants understanding the benefits of diverse diets. Women's involvement in agricultural decision-making was notable, particularly in areas such as crop selection (92%) and land use planning (86%), reflecting their integral role in household agricultural management.
- **Alternative Livelihoods and Market Access:** The study revealed that 75% of women engaged in alternative livelihoods, primarily non-coffee crop farming. However, 74% of these women had not received relevant training, underscoring a gap in capacity-building initiatives. Market access was another critical issue, with many participants citing limited financial resources and inadequate market information as significant barriers. While some women accessed market platforms, their participation remained sporadic, often constrained by a lack of consistent support.

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, the following recommendations are proposed to tailor the project implementation strategies to empower women farmers more effectively.

- **Strengthen access to financial resources and credit facilities for women.** Building on the current level of financial access among women, it is essential to collaborate with financial institutions to create credit facilities specifically designed to meet the needs of women farmers. These facilities should include flexible loan products, savings plans, and microfinance programs aimed at supporting small-scale, women-led agricultural enterprises. Accessibility should be prioritized for women in rural areas, complemented by financial literacy training to improve their ability to navigate credit systems. Over 56% of households report that women are involved in alternative income-generating activities, yet 64% of women still lack access to digital financial services for agricultural transactions.
- **Enhance capacity building and agricultural training for women.** Women farmers need regular training sessions where they can learn modern farming techniques, climate-smart practices, and skills in value addition. The Farmer Field and Business Schools (FFBS) approach and peer-to-peer learning models can ensure that training programs are context-specific and practically focused. This approach helps develop women's hands-on skills,

empowering them to take on leadership roles in agricultural innovation. Notably, 36% of women reported accessing agricultural training occasionally, with less than 6% receiving such training monthly.

- **Strengthen women’s leadership and decision-making in agriculture.** It is crucial to build women’s leadership skills to enhance their participation in decision-making processes at household, community, and cooperative levels. Encouraging women’s representation in leadership roles within agricultural organizations and cooperatives can strengthen their agency in both community and economic decision-making. Presently, at baseline, 34% of women participate in decision-making for agricultural production, indicating a significant but limited level of involvement.
- **Improve women’s access to markets and value chains.** Facilitating women’s access to competitive markets by connecting them with agro-input dealers, buyers, cooperatives, and export channels is key. Supporting digital platforms, collective marketing approaches, and partnerships with the private sector can enhance market access for women’s agricultural products. Currently, less than 22% of female household members access market information daily, with 36% doing so occasionally.
- **Address social and cultural barriers to women’s empowerment.** Engaging men, community leaders, and traditional authorities in dialogues can help challenge harmful gender and social norms that limit women’s access to productive resources, and decision-making power. Community sensitization activities should advocate for equitable roles and responsibilities in agriculture, fostering gender equality in labor distribution, resource control, and household decision-making. Nearly 44% of households report that women face restrictions on alternative livelihood activities due to cultural norms.
- **Support women’s diversified livelihood strategies.** Train women on how to diversify their IGAs beyond agriculture by promoting opportunities in agri-businesses, value-added processing, and small-scale enterprises can align with their skills and market needs. Currently, more than 56% of female household members are involved in alternative livelihood activities, though only 5% report receiving training in diversified skills.
- **Enhance women’s access to productive resources.** It is critical to advocate for women’s rights to land ownership and ensure secure access to essential agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and tools. Collaboration with local governments and stakeholders can help to voice and prioritize women in resource allocation and distribution initiatives, especially regarding land rights and access to agricultural support services. Despite these efforts, 64% of women currently do not use digital financial services for agricultural purposes, underscoring the limited access to modern financial resources.
- **Strengthen partnerships to support women’s empowerment.** Collaborating with local government agencies, civil society organizations, and private-sector actors is essential to create an enabling environment for women farmers. Joint initiatives should focus on resource mobilization, advocacy for women’s rights, and support services that foster women’s economic empowerment. Partnerships promoting gender equality in resource distribution, leadership, and agricultural productivity should be prioritized. Collaborative efforts with local financial institutions and agricultural cooperatives are endorsed by more than 83% of survey respondents.

Conclusion

The baseline study provides critical insights into the existing challenges, opportunities, and needs within the target communities for the SUFFBS-C project. Key findings underscore the significant gender disparities in access to resources, financial services, and decision-making power that continue to limit the economic potential of women farmers. The baseline study highlights the need for targeted interventions to address gender disparities and enhance women's economic empowerment in coffee-growing communities. However, in the subsequent progress report, information on income levels will be provided to support the findings on inclusive market access. Otherwise, key areas of focus include improving access to resources, training, and leadership opportunities while addressing cultural barriers. The SUFFBS-C project's holistic approach aims to create sustainable change, empowering women as agents of agricultural and economic transformation.