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Learning by doing

How family farming as a child shaped my life

by Joseph Karangathi Njoroge, Kenya

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Stories
of
Change

Connecting traditional knowledge and
innovations for fair and sustainable
food systems

United Nations
Decade of
**FAMILY
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Stories of change: *Connecting traditional knowledge and innovations for fair and sustainable food systems*

In December 2017, the [United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Family Farming \(UNDAF, 2019-2028\)](#) thus constituting a framework that recognizes the importance of family farmers, which includes peasants, indigenous people, traditional communities, pastoralists, fisherfolks, upland farmers, and many other groups of food producers that possess a unique potential to promote transformative changes in the way food is grown, produced, processed and distributed.

All over the world, there are thousands of stories of distinctive work carried out anonymously by family farmers, including women and youth, on successful transitions to more inclusive, sustainable and fair food systems. Those stories are based on co-creation and sharing of traditional knowledge and innovations that are helping to make food systems sustainable, leaving no one behind.

In this context, the [Family Farming Knowledge Platform](#) in collaboration with the [Barefoot Guide Connection](#) organized a series of “writeshops”, writing classes to support practitioners to write their own experience, generating knowledge which highlight the practices, changes, innovations and impacts of what they do in support of family farming.

These writeshops represented an opportunity to share the creative process through which identify, recognize, write and exchange stories and experiences from young people, women, farmers, small-scale producers who work to promote, improve and strengthen family farming and achieve prosperous and inclusive rural societies.

This initiative was conceived to provide a space to highlight the human, cultural and social dimensions of family farming, including the human rights embedded in family farming and its social and economic organization.

The stories presented in this compilation - selected among those written during the writeshops, highlight the different ways in which family farmers responsibly and creatively manage their natural resources, landscapes and ecosystems as well as the cultural and symbolic values that define their identity.

Cover photo by Joseph Karangathi Njoroge

Learning by doing: how family farming as a child shaped my life

by Joseph Karangathi Njoroge, Kenya

I grew up in a place known as Kabazi, Subukia Constituency and Nakuru County in Kenya. As a child of a family farming household, I had to participate in farming activities alongside my education. The family depended on its member's labour to be able to provide adequate and nutritious food to the family.

Every evening during dinner, our parents gave us duties or roles that we should accomplish after school the next day. Even at weekends we would get some duties to undertake. Some of the duties included weeding, fodder cutting, pruning, grazing sheep, cleaning the sheep pen, firewood collection, threshing maize, sorting and cleaning beans, among others.

Our neighbors saw us as hard-working children and congratulated our parents for bringing us up in this way, since not all families were able to involve their children in farming. Even though we were so involved in farming activities, I performed well in school and that kept me motivated to pursue my education.

Each one of the five children in our family got used to the roles given out daily. These were alternated to ensure we got experience doing different activities. The one who failed to accomplish the duties given to him/her were reprimanded and those who accomplished them were encouraged and praised for a job well done. Towards the end of each season, we were rewarded with prizes. Some of the rewards

given to us included new clothes, books, some trips to relatives and other surprises that our parents thought of. These rewards motivated us as we entered the next season and we looked forward to doing better.

I wondered whether all children had the same experience in their homes and so I started enquiring from friends in our village and at school. I discovered that most of my friends were going through the same experiences, but some did not. In the case of the few friends who didn't experience the same, their parents were able to hire labour for the farming activities, but in my view, they missed out on an important part of their education.

Critical thinking, leadership and confidence

Our parents wanted both formal and informal education for us and involving us in farming activities was part of that informal education. The tasks we were given were sometimes challenging, demanding critical thinking from us to come up with innovative and relevant solutions. These challenges unlocked my problem-solving skills and boosted my ability to learn at school. The informal and formal education blended well and made me an all-round person with practical skills and ability to handle concepts delivered through the formal education. Both types of education enriched each other in many ways.

My informal education enabled me to integrate farming into my lifestyle and helped to develop my confidence significantly. As I became a teenager, in terms of my leadership development, my parents started engaging me in the planning of farming activities and providing feedback on the performance of crops and livestock enterprises. I became involved in making decisions on those enterprises that were to be initiated or expanded in the farm.

Career influence by involvement in family farming

I developed a passion for farming and the interest continued even when I entered high school and afterwards at college when I pursued a course in organic farming, rural development and extension. I worked for over ten years as an extension officer and gained good experience working with family farmers. Later I established an NGO known as Maendeleo Endelevu Action Program (MEAP) that use participatory extension service to family farmers, where farmers contribute in identifying their needs and participate in addressing them. I enjoy working with farmers because of the orientation I was given at a young age.

Today, I involve my children in farming and home-based activities as a vital part of their education. I also encourage other farmers to share and involve their children in farming to provide hands-on education where the children learn by doing and through direct experience.

The impact of over-emphasizing academic education

Due to the over-emphasis on academic performance for children, parents have been reducing the time they involve children in farming and others never involve them. The school curriculum likewise does not provide opportunities for practical and informal education. This trend does not only deny children the opportunity to acquire informal education but also makes them less interested in family farming. As a result, there is limited intergenerational knowledge transfer between

parents and children and an increase in rural urban migration by young people leaving the older population to do the farming. With fewer energetic young people involved in farming, there is increased likelihood of lower production capacity that affects both food and nutrition security among citizens in rural and urban areas.

It is therefore my urgent call for parents, school administrators and stakeholders to consider creating space for children to have access to both informal and formal education especially in family farming to grow them more fully as human beings and to facilitate continued production capacity for both food and nutrition security.



Photo by Joseph Karangathi Njoroge

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