

# Evidencing the Sustainability of Ripple Effect's Volunteer Farmer Trainer Extension Approach

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It starts on an African farm



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## Summary

Ripple Effect US commissioned the following study to inform the knowledge gaps around how resourcing, capacity, motivation, and institutional linkages can be mobilized to sustain and incentivize the Volunteer Farmer Trainers (VFTs) community-level service delivery model after donor-funded projects are completed. The research is an Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL) activity funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.

Volunteer approaches increased significantly since the early 2000s, but evaluations of these have not yet systematically identified the enablers and drivers that make externally funded approaches sustainable.

The study was conducted in Northern and Eastern Uganda, where Ripple Effect had implemented the *Improving Agricultural Production and Income Project* (2013-2015), and in Nyanza and Western Provinces of Kenya, where the *Wealth Creation Project* (2013 – 2017) took place. The research considered the following questions:

1. How effective were the sustainability plans in facilitating continuity and scaling of volunteer-led extension services?
2. What are the enablers and barriers, trends across gender, age, and disability that sustained the extension services of each project?
3. What are the most applicable lessons from the VFT approach to incorporate into sustainable nutrition programming?

Study participants included farmers representing 1,083 households from Ripple Effect projects in Uganda (522) and Kenya (561) along with 109 VFTs – 73 from Uganda and 36 from Kenya.

## Findings

Overall, the sustainability plans adopted by Ripple Effect contributed to the continuity of extension services among the communities in the treatment and control group.

The plans included:

- embedding peer extension support in group activities,
- establishing savings and credit initiatives at group level,
- linking VFTs to the government extension system.

The research found that 51% of households in the treatment group in Uganda, and 87% in Kenya, continued to receive extension support post-project.

The main factors that enabled the VFTs to continue providing extension support in Ripple Effect projects resonate with the evidence from similar studies and include:

## Continuous capacity development

VFTs continued to receive training in new value chains such as soya bean production. Some VFTs in Kenya acquired specialized skills that increased demand for new services enabling them to charge clients a fee that improved the sustainability of their ongoing volunteer roles.

## Linkages to other institutions

This was a critical factor in fostering the continuity of VFT extension services. In Uganda, 37% of VFTs and 89% in Kenya reported that they had connected with other institutions within the last two years. Strong links in Kenya were attributed to VFTs deliberately collaborating with the local government and to establishing their own VFT associations.

On the other hand, linkages between VFTs and local government extension in Uganda were either weak or non-existent, which was partly attributed to overall challenges with the existing government extension service system and the low education levels of Ugandan VFTs that affected their ability to network with other actors.

Analysis of linkages by gender showed female VFTs, although higher in number than male VFTs, were somewhat disadvantaged when it came to developing linkages because of limited exposure or access to information, domestic workload, and fear of sexual harassment.

**Demand for VFT services was much higher in Kenya, which was attributed to better linkages to other institutions and the strategic decision of VFTs from there to acquire specialized skills and offer services that were not easy to find in their communities, such as:**

- poultry vaccination
- stocking inputs
- macro propagation of bananas
- breeding of goats

## Embedding VFT activities in a group approach

The group structures such as farmers groups, savings and credit initiatives, and cooperatives continued to provide opportunities for members to share agricultural information among themselves and to seek technical support from VFTs and other relevant external actors.

## Volunteer Farmer Trainer Motivation

The study found several different factors that motivated VFTs to continue providing extension support, the most prominent being:

- desire to gain knowledge and skills
- increased demand for training
- appeal of social benefits (respect, recognition in the community, expanding social network)
- self-sacrifice, a desire to serve their communities
- free inputs and tools provided by the project

The ability to generate income from maintaining the sustainable agriculture technologies promoted by the projects also motivated VFTs to continue providing extension services.

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