



CRS' FARMER TO FARMER PROGRAM

Building resilience

THE BASICS

419

NARRATIVES COLLECTED FROM PROJECT PARTICIPANTS IN KENYA

40%

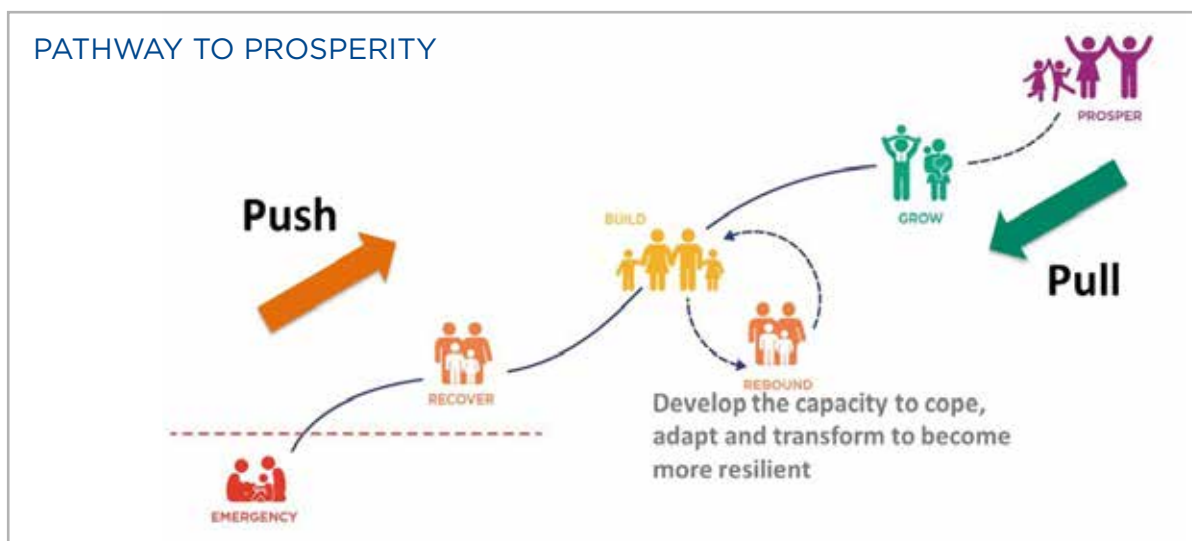
OF PARTICIPANTS PROGRESSED ALONG THE PATHWAY TO PROSPERITY

20%

OF PARTICIPANTS REBOUNDED BETTER AFTER FACING SHOCKS OR STRESSORS

INTRODUCTION

For the past four years, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and its host organizations have been implementing the Farmer-to-Farmer Program in Eastern Africa. The program is intended to promote sustainable growth, food security and agricultural development through the assignment of volunteers with agricultural expertise to share their skills and help build the capacity of farmers via short-term training and technical assistance interventions. The program contributes to CRS' overall agriculture and livelihoods programming, which supports rural families to achieve a living income, build their resilience and prosper in sustainable landscapes. To achieve this, CRS works with farmers recovering from shocks and stressors to build and grow their assets, pushing them onto the Pathway to Prosperity. CRS also works with better-off farmers who are growing their assets, as well as with other value chain actors, to pull farmers along this pathway. As CRS recognizes that farmers periodically face different types of shocks and stressors, it also focuses its work on developing their capacity for coping with these challenges and for adapting and transforming to build their resilience.





Geraldine, a student from the University of Nairobi in Kenya, facilitates the collection of a narrative and its self-signification with a Farmer-to-Farmer project participant. Photo by Rita Muckenhirn for CRS

THE STUDY

From March to July 2017, CRS carried out an evaluation to assess the progress of its work with the Farmer to Farmer program. The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What pathways did farmers experience due to the process of change fostered by the program?
- How did the different pathways followed by farmers influence their development outcomes?
- What assets made the difference for progressing along the pathway to prosperity and rebounding when faced with shocks or stressors?
- How did the Farmer to Farmer Program contribute to accessing these assets?
- What livelihoods strategies did farmers pursue and how did they influence their advancement along the pathway and their resilience?

METHODOLOGY

A complexity-aware methodology called SenseMaker® was used to conduct this evaluation. As a narrative-based approach, SenseMaker® deals with complex situations and interventions that are essential for development processes that are non-linear, multi-actor, unpredictable, and long-term, such as resilience.

Respondents are asked to share a story of an experience, in this case related to a process of change that occurred in the last four years and that significantly influenced the wellbeing of their family, which is captured as a narrative. They are then asked to add meaning to (signify) their stories by responding to closed-ended questions.

The combination of narratives and signification data provide detailed, and insightful information, which is immediately accessible for visualization and analysis.

RESULTS: KEY MESSAGES

THE PATHWAYS

The study found that 40 percent of farmers could progress along the pathway to prosperity. These farmers were described by a group of respondents who analyzed the narratives as farmers who are smart and industrious workers and received support from programs that empowered them. They also described them as focused farmers who access information, attend trainings, adapt to change, keep records, plan, commit to implement new practices, have networks, access markets, manage their finances well, have a savings culture and are influential.

The study also found that 20 percent of farmers could rebound better after facing shocks and stressors. These farmers were described as updated, adaptive, open-minded, flexible, creative and innovative farmers. They were also described as hard-working and persistent farmers who have will and who balance diversification with focus.

Forty percent of farmers were found to be rebounding after facing shocks and stressors, but were still in a worse situation than before. These farmers were highly affected by droughts, pests and diseases, and described as lacking

farming skills and financially constrained. As such, they were unable to invest in their farming or adopt improved practices and technologies. Instead they produced mainly for their own consumption and were trapped in a vicious cycle of borrowing, leading to perpetual debt.

THE PATHWAYS AND INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

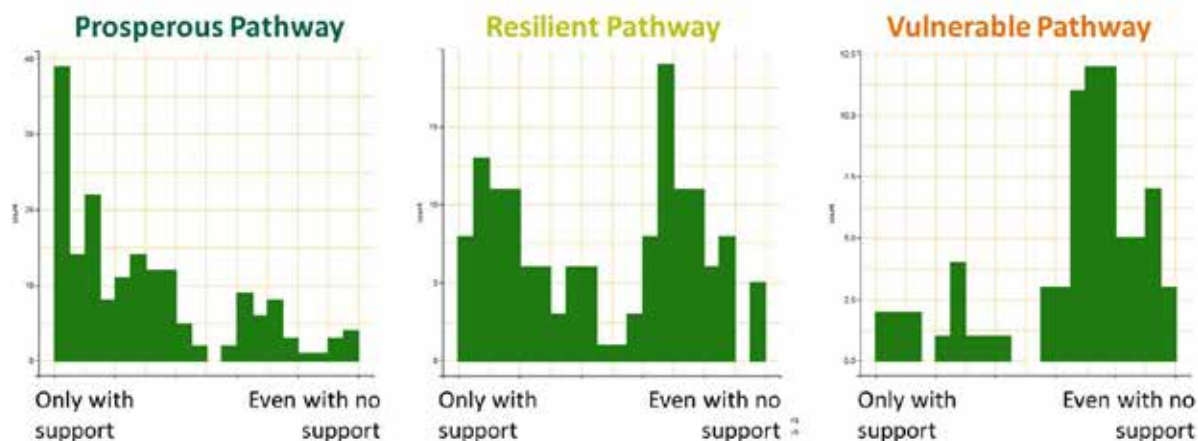
A strong association was found between the pathway followed and the development outcomes in its three dimensions:

1. **Livelihoods:** food security, income, employment opportunities and housing
2. **Access to institutional services:** basic services, health services and education opportunities
3. **Empowerment:** decision-making power, gender equity, influence capacity and resilience capabilities.

ACCESS TO ASSETS AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FARMER-TO-FARMER PROGRAM

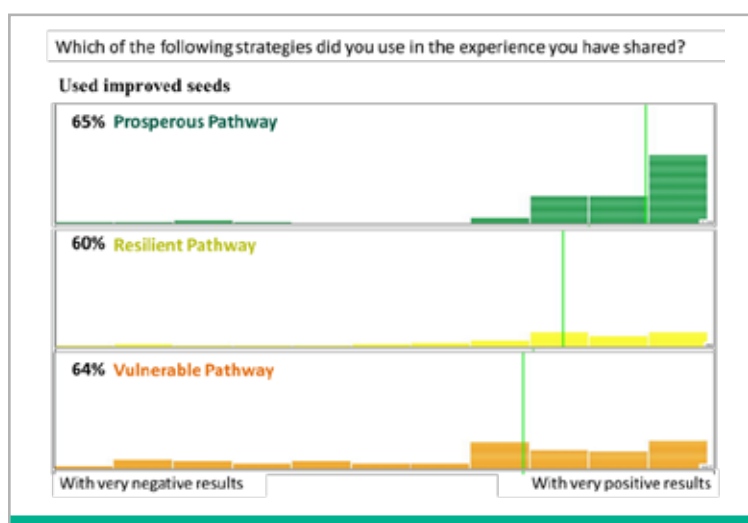
- **Human assets** were important in all experiences of change. The most important being labor and ability to work together with good attitude and effort, followed by knowledge, skills, experience, and access to information. Among these human assets, access to information and to new knowledge and skills made a significant difference in the pathways followed by farmers.
- **Social assets** were also very important. Family, relatives, neighbors and friends, across all pathways, stood out very prominently, followed by relations with the CRS Farmer-to-Farmer program volunteers and host organizations, CRS local partners, community organizations and leaders, buyers, input suppliers and other NGOs. Relations with community leaders and organizations, CRS Farmer-to-Farmer program, CRS local partners and other NGOs, as well as with input suppliers made a significant difference in the pathways followed by farmers.
- **Natural assets**, especially access to farms with fertile soils and water resources, were very important for the processes of change shared by project participants, followed by having access to seeds or seedlings, biodiversity and forest resources. As natural resources are the basis for agriculture, all these resources made a difference for those farmers who could progress along the pathway and/or rebound better after faced with shocks or stressors.
- **Physical assets** such as roads and means of transportation were important for all respondents, followed by having access to water systems, and productive equipment and infrastructure. The latter made the difference for farmers to follow a prosperous or resilient pathway.
- **Financial assets** such as cash, savings, credit and inputs were important for all respondents, as well as having assets that can easily be converted into cash such as stored produce, chickens, and livestock. Those that made a difference between farmers who progressed and were resilient were access to own land and to inputs.

The experience of change that you have shared, would have occurred...



LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

Sixty-three and sixty-eight percent of farmers pursued agriculture intensification strategies such as the use of improved seeds and the adoption of new technologies and practices. Having used improved seeds, technologies or practices did not make the difference on the pathway followed, but the success that farmers had with them. This is an important insight for program implementation that was possible to obtain by using SenseMaker® as it provided information not only on the percentage of farmers who adopted certain technologies or practices, but also the extent to which these yielded positive results. In addition, there was a significantly higher percentage of farmers who not only adopted water harvesting practices, but had a more positive experience with these practices among those who followed prosperous and resilient pathways, than among those who followed a vulnerable one (47, 34 and 29%, respectively). This specific practice proved to be very important for coping with drought and as a response to this situation being more recurrent in Eastern and Western Kenya.



More farmers who followed a prosperous and resilient pathway pursued agriculture diversification than those who followed a vulnerable pathway (61% vs. 51%); however, it was not only a matter of diversifying but of doing it with positive results. Going back to the narratives to understand this better, it was clear that a well thought-out and focused diversification process yielded positive results more often than when the process was improvised and unfocused. The same pattern can be observed among farmers who aimed to engage with new markets (43% vs. 32%), or develop new agribusiness initiatives (28% vs. 21%).

On the other hand, farmers who followed a vulnerable pathway tend to be moving into off-farm employment and non-agriculture activities, but only very few were pursuing temporary or permanent migration (1.8% and 3%, respectively). Thus, when farmers were asked about where they saw their family's future, prosperous and resilient farmers saw it mainly in agriculture and livestock activities, while vulnerable ones only saw it in non-agriculture activities.

