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## Stories from the FoodSTART+ and SOLID collaboration on farmer business schools in Indonesia

Farmer Business School (FBS) is a participatory learning approach that strengthens farmers' involvement in agricultural value chains.

A series of group-based experiential activities over a production-marketing cycle, FBS facilitates farmers' interaction with other chain actors and stakeholders.

The FBS approach was developed by the International Potato Center (CIP) in 2008 as part of an Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research-funded project linking vegetable farmers with key markets in West and Central Java, Indonesia. Building on the FBS experience in Indonesia, the Food Security Through Asian Root and Tuber Crops (FoodSTART) project, led by CIP, has successfully promoted its adoption through an International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) investment project in the Philippines. The second phase of FoodSTART, known as FoodSTART+ has introduced and scaled FBS with IFAD investments in the Philippines, India and Indonesia.

The FBS approach has evolved over time to make it more comprehensive and responsive to issues, such as climate change and gender equality. The FBS curriculum is flexible and adaptable to the needs of partner investment projects.

In 2017, the FBS approach was used in Smallholder Livelihood Development (SOLID), a project funded by IFAD and carried out in two Indonesian districts: Seram Bagian Timur (SBT) in Maluku and Halmahera Selatan (HalSel) in Maluku Utara. A total of ten FBS groups, five in each district, have been established through collaboration between SOLID and FoodSTART+.

The FBS groups were taught how to identify and analyze market opportunities, add value to their local commodities and establish micro-enterprises. Through the FBS, they have transformed their sweetpotato, cassava, banana waste, fish and seaweed into higher value products such as chips, pastries, jams and flour. Where fishing is an important source for livelihoods, a range of composite products from root crops and marine commodities (for example cassava-anchovy crackers) was developed and launched.

The FBS groups successfully showcased their products at business launches in HalSel in October and SBT a month later. Once SOLID closes, the groups should be able to operate independently, but the local government in SBT has agreed to extend support to selected FBS groups.

Stories told by FBS participants in Indonesia show the positive change in their lives.

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## MAY LO FARMER BUSINESS SCHOOL, SOLANG VILLAGE

### "Root crops are nutritious and important to me and my family"

The May Lo Farmer Business School (FBS) group, located in Solang in the Teluk Waru sub-district of SBT, Maluku, includes 13 females and 6 males and is part of the SOLID project under the SBT Food Security Office.

The group chose sweetpotato as their commodity because it is a staple food commonly grown and consumed in the village. Group members believe sweetpotato has good market prospects and focuses on sweetpotato flour (from orange, purple and white varieties) and derived food products such as black forest cake, ice cream and cookies.

Though familiar with sweetpotato cultivation, the group is new to processing flour and food products. To date, only three members actively participate in the processing group.

***Farida Fonty**, 38, has been active in SOLID since joining in 2013. The married mother of four children is interested in FBS because of the nutritional value of root crops, namely sweetpotato. The knowledge she has gained through demonstration plot activities deepened her interest in sweetpotato, especially given the need to feed her family nutritious food. Another reason is the market opportunities sweetpotato offers, as many people like to consume it.*

*Fonty explained that before FBS she had no knowledge of the nutritional properties of sweetpotato but has since learned a lot about the varieties, and their vitamin and*



*mineral content, adding that sweetpotato is more nutritious than rice. Her husband agrees with her on the nutritional value of sweetpotato and now their family eats more root and tuber crops than before. Moreover, she affirmed that, after learning that sweetpotato vegetables(leaves) are rich in protein, they now eat them at least twice per week.*

*Her personal plan is to expand the FBS sweetpotato business by opening a market stall in front of her house where she can sell root crops, including those produced by other FBS members.*

### "There will be challenges but we will continue because it (FBS) is interesting"

***Abdul Rahman**, 50, from the Beli Indah SOLID Self Help Group in Solang, is the head of the May Lo FBS group. He came to know about the FBS though Pak Rahim, a Department of Agriculture extension worker in the area. He became interested in sweetpotato varieties in the demonstration plot, as this was new to him. Group members decided to work with sweetpotato because they are marketable and cultivation is easy.*

*Rahman believes that FBS will be helpful in increasing incomes, especially because of the products processed from sweetpotato like flour, cakes, ice cream and others. He values the connection to business that FBS facilitated, and the focus on entrepreneurship.*

*Looking towards the future, he noted that the newly formed FBS group will face challenges but will continue because it is interesting.*





## TIGA K, KELUBAS SUB-VILLAGE

### "New product, new markets from root crops"

The Tiga K FBS group, from the Kelubas sub-village of Amarsekaru in the Pulau Gorom sub-district of SBT, Maluku, started in April 2018 under the SOLID project. The group is formed by six SOLID self-help groups and has 23 members of which 15 are female and 8 are male.

The group was interested in sweetpotato and chose it as their main commodity because it is easy to cultivate and is a staple food in the village. Their FBS products include sweetpotato chips and sweetpotato crackers. They also have cassava chips with fish (cakalang/tuna).

One of the group's biggest challenges is drying raw materials to produce quality products. They tried different drying techniques three times, and found one that was suitable. They learned that timing is important especially during the rainy season.

FBS members target the local schools as an important market and have already sold a few batches of chips to school children at IDR 2,000 and 5,000 per pack.



*Moksen Bone, 42, has recently become the new leader of the Tiga K FBS group, as the former head left to work in Papua province.*

*In his view, the most significant change brought by FBS is the members' motivation and knowledge to produce and market new products in their locality.*

*When asked about the challenges that they might face in the marketing of the FBS products, he mentioned the limited raw materials in*

*their community, and the plan to purchase from Bula, the provincial capital. But he also mentioned encouraging all households in the Kelubas Sub-Village to plant cassava and sweetpotato. He will get additional planting materials from other FBS groups in Solang and Belis.*

## WATU LOLOLI, INLOMIN SUB-VILLAGE

### "Cassava is grown in my village, and it helps increase our income"

The Watu Lololi FBS group is located in the sub-village of Inlomin in Amarsekaru Village in the Pulau Gorom sub-district of SBT, Maluku. Amarsekaru is at least 15 hours away by boat from Bula, the capital of SBT. The FBS group is composed of 15 members -- 11 females and 4 males. The group is part of the SOLID project under the SBT Food Security Agency.

The FBS group chose cassava flour as the main commodity because cassava is largely grown and available in their community - a staple food consumed by villagers. The group is interested in producing cassava flour and derived food products such as *sagu kasbi* and *geperom* cassava fiber).

The group's main challenges were the limited selling potential of the products in their village and access to equipment to commercially produce food products. So they developed a strategy to address this. The FBS group was able to mobilize the capital required to purchase equipment to make cassava biscuits and brownies. Happy because their products are regularly sold out, they now they have a fund of IDR 600,000.



*Sitti, 42, was keen to join FBS because of her interest to learn. The significant change she had upon attending FBS and SOLID activities is her increased knowledge to make cassava flour, and the new experience in selling products. Cassava flour is cheaper than existing wheat flour in market, she said. The FBS group products were sold and working together as a group to process and market their products is a completely new thing for them. Her vision is to have more income from cassava flour and processing of food products to help improve her family livelihood.*

## WATUKAF, BELIS VILLAGE

### "Let's plant more sweetpotato, it's fun and sells out quickly"

Members of the Watukaf FBS group, located in the village of Belis in the Teluk Waru sub-district of SBT, Maluku, come from the self-help groups established and supported by SOLID. They have a total of 12 members of which 4 are female and 8 are male. Their chosen FBS commodity is sweetpotato. The FBS activities started in May 2018 with the planting of their sweetpotato demo plot on 0.5 hectare in Belis.

In October 2018, the FBS group harvested five sweetpotato varieties from their demo plot. Cilembu, a variety with orange flesh and high sweetness, was the most preferred.

With this new experience, the FBS group plans to plant more sweetpotato for the market, both in the demo plot and in individual farms of the members. The immediate plan is to secure a loan of IDR 10 million from SOLID to be equally shared among four households to plant sweetpotato.



*Udin Rumalutur, 49, is the chairperson of the FBS group. He was trained as one of the FBS facilitators in February 2018 in Ternate. He is interested to learn about root crops, particularly sweetpotato. He is quite new to farming as he recently moved back to Belis after spending many years in another location for his business. He is intrigued with sweetpotato as he finds*

*the crop easy to cultivate and harvest, and to market too. Sweetpotato is more fun than other crops, he said. Motivated to continue to plant sweetpotato, he plans to secure a loan from SOLID to open a new planting area.*

*The money will be primarily used to construct fences as wild pigs can destroy the crops, a major problem in the area.*

### "Sweetpotato has good commercial value"



*Mohammad Rivai, 38, is the Vice Chairperson of FBS group and has been farming for many years. He became interested in sweetpotato because, following the FBS group's recent experience with the demo plot harvest, he observed that it is easy to sell. He is motivated by the FBS and demo plot activities under SOLID and FoodSTART+, which have showed the good commercial prospects for sweetpotato on the market. He plans to clear his one hectare of land, get a loan from SOLID to fence it off so that he can plant sweetpotato. He is interested to plant all five varieties that were introduced and evaluated through the demo plot.*

#### About FoodSTART+

**Food Resilience Through Root and Tuber Crops in Upland and Coastal Communities of the Asia-Pacific (FoodSTART+)**, a project that ran from 2015 to 2018, built on the IFAD-supported Food Security Through Asian Root and Tuber Crops (FoodSTART) project. It was coordinated by the International Potato Center (CIP) and implemented in collaboration with the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Asia. The project worked closely with the CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB) and the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS). It was funded by IFAD and the European Union (EU).

The project enhanced food resilience among poor households in upland and coastal communities of the Asia-Pacific region through introducing root and tuber crop innovations.

To achieve this goal at scale, the project developed validated and implemented effective partnership strategies with IFAD investment projects to promote root and tuber crops for food security.

FoodSTART+ was implemented in partnership with Livelihoods and Access to Markets Project (LAMP), India; Smallholder Livelihood Development Project (SOLID), Indonesia; Fisheries, Coastal Resources and Livelihood Project (FishCORAL) and Integrated Natural Resources and Environmental Management Project (INREMP), Philippines; and Sustainable Rural Development for the Poor Project (SRDP), Vietnam.

The project's key components were:

1. Project start-up and scoping studies, including mapping on food vulnerability of root and tuber crop production;
2. Research for development (R4D) partnership development;
3. Analysis of the needs and opportunities in gender-sensitive root and tuber crop innovations;
4. R4D action planning and launching; and
5. Documentation and knowledge product development.

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