



case
study



Uganda Red Cross Society experience in community-based food security initiatives

In the northern and eastern regions of the country food security and malnutrition constitute some of the biggest humanitarian challenges. A number of factors including erratic rainfall, recurrent droughts, livestock diseases, cattle raiding, scarce livelihood opportunities, population growth and displacement as well as poor health and water and sanitation render the situation in the region extremely fragile and further exacerbate food insecurity.

Jimmy Olum, a Red Cross volunteer in the northern region of Karamoja confirms this by saying: *“This time it rains, the next time it doesn’t rain, this time rain is too much, the area gets flooded, which makes it very unpredictable. You can plan right now, but then the sun comes and the crops dry. The weather becomes a huge challenge. You cannot predict the season and predict whether you will have enough rainfall. However, we also have problems of pests and diseases that affect the crops and reduce our yields.”*

The majority of the population undertakes a form of mixed crop and livestock farming for their own consumption purposes and to ensure their economic security. Livestock is generally moved seasonally between the wet and the dry season grazing areas, and crop production includes

Country context: Uganda

In 2011, the UNDP Human Development Index ranked Uganda 161 out of 187¹ countries. Approximately a quarter of the total population live in poverty, the poorest regions being the northern and eastern parts of the country. More than twenty years of conflict and insecurity in Uganda has not only destroyed the local economy and entrapped people in deep poverty, but existing vulnerabilities have been further exacerbated by challenges due to climate change.

A woman whistles to call the wind as she separates grain from chaff near the town of Kotido in the Karamoja region of northeastern Uganda. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC



In the past, food security practices in Uganda, which have been supported by both national and international organizations, have not achieved desired long-term results. This has been partly due to a lack of participatory strategies for beneficiaries during project design and implementation stages, and a tendency to treat ongoing recovery operations in the same manner as emergency operations, leading to a culture of dependency in some cases.

In the immediate to short-term, increases in the frequency and intensity of local coping strategies as well as the provision of external emergency aid have offset much of the acute food security challenges facing the region's population. However, over the years, long-term improvements that focus on sustainable food cultivation, disaster risk reduction and mobilization of local resources has not been achieved.



A woman separating grain from chaff in her village in the Karamoja region of northeastern Uganda. Traditional farming methods are employed in this part of Uganda where food security is a challenge, especially during the dry season. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC

sorghum, millet, maize, groundnuts, beans and other varieties for household consumption and income generation. Under the existing conditions these practices are, however, increasingly jeopardized. Not only are crop yields affected, but also pastoral conditions have deteriorated and cattle herds have diminished in the past few years.

This case study provides an example of community-based food security initiatives in the northern and eastern parts of the country, which have the potential for long-term impact and can provide a blueprint for other communities facing similar food security crises.

Community-based food security initiatives

Food security and livelihoods and water and sanitation activities in the Panyangara and Kotido sub-counties

- Project duration: August 2011-July 2013
- Partner: German Red Cross

In 2010, the Uganda Red Cross Society developed an integrated food security strategy that was based on a community-based model, with most of the implementation being carried out by local National Society volunteers and programme beneficiaries. The food security strategy focused on activities to reduce risk, build disaster pre-

paredness and provide relief and recovery for the most vulnerable communities.

In order to improve the living conditions in the northern and eastern regions of the country in the long-run, the National Society has among others implemented projects in the Kibuku and Kotido districts. Target areas in the latter district are the sub-counties of Panyangara and Kotido in the Karamojong sub-region. These are the most frequently affected areas in terms of food insecurity. The objective of the activities was to help the population adapt to an increasingly sedentary way of life and to cope with the effects of climate change. Communities were thereby encouraged to engage in food security activities according to their needs and resources.

Food security and livelihoods activities

Kotido district in the Karamoja region

After the situation in the Kotido district became acute in 2008 the Uganda Red Cross Society continued to deliver immediate assistance to households who were in an acute phase of chronic food insecurity. Concurrently, in 2011 the National Society initiated a recovery project for 18 settled agro-pastoralists.

Due to the poor health and water and sanitation conditions in the region, the project components also integrated water and sanitation into the food security and livelihoods project.

In Kotido, three main integrated food security and livelihoods activities were implemented.

These include the distribution of farm inputs, which is linked to the multiplication of seeds and the diversification of people's diet; post-harvest storage and manage-



ment techniques; and income generating activities such as beekeeping.

While 40 per cent of the project budget is dedicated to the provision of materials, 60 per cent is used for participatory learning and training as preparedness measures. In order to enhance local community ownership all projects are implemented by the beneficiaries, while the National Society provides material, equipment and technical training. The use of community action

A woman pumps clear water from a borehole drilled by the Red Cross near in her village in the Karamoja region of northeastern Uganda. During the dry season clean water can become scarce and crops and animals die. Boreholes such as these, which are up to 150 metres deep, provide much needed water. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC

“The diet of the people here was basically limited to meat and blood but because the number of animals has reduced and the number of cows that they used to grow diminished, sorghum was produced as a supplement, which however is not enough for a healthy diet.

We have therefore distributed seeds for the vegetable gardens that were introduced. This is how we call them. They are seeds for vegetables like, cabbages, spinach, eggplants or onions to enrich the diet at household level.”

Jimmy Olum, Red Cross volunteer in the Kotido District

plans to implement activities have thereby helped to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities for both the communities and the Uganda Red Cross Society.

As the diet of the Karamojong was limited to meat and sorghum, sustainable vegetable garden maintenance was heavily promoted to facilitate a more diverse and healthier diet.

With the help of the National Society, beneficiaries have realized their capabilities and through participatory approaches they have worked on developing group-block farming which enables them to set up individual gardens. Furthermore, the National Society has provided training sessions in order to introduce best practices.

Seeds have been distributed to 4,000 households, together with farm imple-

ments such as hoes and machetes, and people are taught how best to utilize their land and water to ensure vegetables and herbs can grow. The Uganda Red Cross Society’s volunteers teach beneficiaries about seed multiplication and how to use seasonal calendars to facilitate early planting of seeds, and anticipate the arrival of local crop pests. In order to maintain the source of water for agricultural practices or own consumption, beneficiaries have introduced a community contribution scheme for minor borehole repairs. All this has contributed to the increase of safe water sources, increased food production and a diversified diet.

With regard to post-harvest storage and management techniques, a modern warehouse was built so that some of the cereals harvested could be stored and used during the dry season when food becomes scarce. This has had a sizeable impact on quality control, as grain and seeds stored properly on pallets in modern, improved storage structures are less prone to damage from insects and moisture. Training has been provided in post-harvest handling and advice has also been given via radio talk shows, stickers and brochures.

Beekeeping is the third activity that was implemented as an income generating activity and initiated by the community itself. The produced honey and wax is

“The implemented food security and livelihoods project has two components: food security and livelihoods and water and sanitation. We provide 4,000 households with farm implements and farm seeds and we want people to multiply their seeds. It is the access to food which we want to improve. Based on the community’s knowledge and the potential they saw in beekeeping, the beekeeping activity was implemented. It was the community itself that chose to implement the project as an income generating activity in one of the weekly group dynamic sessions.

There have also been improvements in the water system. Wherever there is little water or the population is great and there is only one borehole people in the community always report this to the Red Cross, who take up the action and drill a borehole wherever it is needed. Through the boreholes the availability and quality of water has been improved for household consumption, irrigation and livestock rearing.”

Paul Ongon, Food security and livelihoods project manager in Kitodo

mainly sold on markets as a source of income. However, some of it is also used for the household's own consumption.

Kibuku District – Bugiri village integrated organic farm

Kibuku district – Bugiri Village integrated organic farm

- Project duration: 2008–2010
- Partner: Norwegian Red Cross

Although food security issues are not as acute in Kibuku as they are further north in Karamoja, poverty levels still remain unacceptably high at around 50 per cent. Malnutrition also remains an ongoing concern in the low land area of the region, particularly during the dry and flood seasons.

The integrated organic farm in Bugiri village in the Kibuku district of Uganda is an example of how the Uganda Red Cross Society's food security programme has been helping communities. The programme aimed to increase the food yield of the land and to develop commercial farming alongside traditional subsistence farming in order to build the community's resilience to food insecurity in the long-run.

Although the project officially ended in 2010, the activities have been ongoing and are maintained through the use of beneficiaries' own resources and human capital. The National Society's staff and volunteers continue to provide limited support. The National Society also continues to develop ongoing efforts linking beneficiaries up with other local or international donors, as well as providing them with small top-up funds, whenever possible.

The project leader, Waiswa Nathan Stephen planting trees in the Bugiri integrated organic farm in Kasira, Uganda. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC



Waiswa Nathan Stephen was the project leader at the integrated organic farm in Bugiri village. With Red Cross assistance he has established a sustainable and diverse small farming operation that feeds the village and trades produce at the local market in Tirinyi. Money earned at the market is then again reinvested in the farm, further increasing the food yield.

Bugiri Organic Farm Association and trained members in beekeeping skills. The community is planning to expand their beekeeping to more than 40 beehives and to start candle wax processing at their centre. In order to maximize bargaining power and financial return in the local market, they have established an association to sell honey as a group.



Beehives donated by Uganda Red Cross Society to the Bugiri integrated organic farm in Kasasira, Uganda. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC

Waiswa has trained villagers and Red Cross volunteers in basic soil management techniques, efficient water collection, conservation and usage, crop rotation, beekeeping, fish farming and pig breeding. Rainwater is collected from the grass roofs of village huts, where it picks up nutrients, before being used on plants. Floodwaters were channeled in ways that maximize water retention in the soil and crop rotation is practiced.

The Uganda Red Cross Society has also given 20 Kenyan top bar beehives to the

Due to the ongoing support of the National Society, the farm was recently able to establish a piggery where pigs are reared for market. A fish farm has also been set up in a large pond on the land that is used to sell fish on a demand basis. Both of these activities are important sources of income generation and have potential to grow. With its “look-back strategy” the National Society assesses and evaluates the entire project, which it uses to identify capacity for supporting beneficiaries in scaling-up their activities.



The integrated nature of organic and sustainable farming is key, given that each component contributes to the functioning of the farming system. Poultry droppings provide nutrients to the fishpond, which are sold to buy pigs. The pig manure again fertilizes the land, which produces fruits, vegetables and flowers that again provide the bees with nectar to produce honey. This again is sold on markets and the money is reinvested in the farm.

The fishpond the in Bugiri integrated organic farm in Kasasira, Uganda. Fish are farmed here and sold to the local population. The integrated organic farm in Bugiri village is an example of how the Uganda Red Cross Society helps communities increase food yield of their land. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC

“People want to be trained in organic farming because they don’t have enough land here in Uganda. That is why we want to train people how they can use their small compound. We have something that we call ‘five per cent of your land out of a hundred,’ meaning that five per cent can feed you and your family and can also be a source for income. Even on a verandah you can get vegetables and other food.

When we get honey we have to sell it. But first we have to come together as a group after having harvested the honey in order to calculate how much we have gathered from the boxes. We do not want to sell one by one, we want to sell the honey as a group to maximize the return rate.”

Waiswa Nathan Stephen, Project leader of the Bugiri integrated organic farm in the Kibuku district

Lessons learned

- Communities need to be consulted in the planning and implementation of any project and their ideas should be supported to promote ownership.
- It is critical that time is taken to learn about communities' coping strategies as well as how to integrate their resources and human capital in order to assure sustainable project impact.
- The use of community action plans to implement activities defines roles and responsibilities for both the communities and the National Society.
- The integration of women is crucial for the success of projects.
- Projects contribute to social inclusion and participatory approaches are strengthening communities.
- Monitoring and evaluation of projects is very important for the sustainability of project impact.
- Good practices strengthen the relationship between communities and the National Society's branches and thereby increase the volunteer base.

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1. UNDP, 2011. 'Human Development Report. Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All. Uganda.' [online]. Available at: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/UGA.pdf>. [Accessed 29.01.2013].



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