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End-line Survey and Final Evaluation of a capacity-building Food Security and Livelihoods Project phase II of Uganda Red Cross Society



Swizen Kyomuhendo, PhD
AKLED Research Institute
Tel:+256772931070
Email:swizenk@gmail.com

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It is our hope that we all internalize the results of this Endline Survey and Evaluation, and also fully utilize the lessons and recommendations in improving URCS efforts in FSL in humanitarian contexts.

Swizen Kyomuhendo, PhD
DIRECTOR,
AKLED Research Institute Ltd
www.akled.org

Acronyms and abbreviations

BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CEA	Community Engagement and Accountability
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
FSL	Food Security and Livelihoods
GoU	Government of Uganda
GRC	German Red Cross
HH	Household
HHS	Household Hunger Scale
HoO	Head of Office
HR	Human Resource
IFRC	the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
MADs	Ministries, Agencies and Departments
NDP	National Development Plan
NS	National Society
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PMER	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
PNS	Partner National Society
POC	Persons of Concern
RCRC	Red Cross and Red Crescent
SCM	Supply Chain Management
SMT	Senior Management Team
SP	Strategic Plan
SSF	Social Structure Fund
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
URCS	Uganda Red Cross Society
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WFP	World Food Programme

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Executive Summary

Background

The Integrated Food Security, Livelihoods and Household energy Project is a three years' project support with funding from the BMZ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) and German Red Cross (GRC). Its goal is to contribute to better living conditions and improved self- help capacities of displaced people and the host population, as well as improving the capacities of the URCS in planning and implementing appropriate programming in displacement contexts.

Purpose

- a) To identify to which extent the project objective, outcomes and output indicators are achieved
- b) To assess level of achievement in comparison with the results of the baseline study implemented at the beginning of the project
- c) To organize evaluation process, review and analysis of the project, based on the OECD/DAC criteria.
- d) To document the results of the analysis as well as lessons learned and recommendations

Methodology

The end-line survey and evaluation adopted a cross-sectional design using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, concurrently undertaken; the evaluation was guided by OECD/DAC criteria which emphasizes assessing aspects of design, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Methods included structured household interviews administered to a sample of 395 households, use of focus group discussions with beneficiary community members and URCS volunteers, in-depth interviews with project staff and key informant interviews with selected stakeholders, including OPM, district local governments, community leaders, GRC and senior management at URCS Hqs.

Results

Project Effectiveness

Micro level

At descriptive level, significant improvement in FSL for refugee households and host community as evident across key indicators on the Hunger Scale. This is despite the short period of intervention (2021-2023). The majority (98.2%) of target beneficiaries received agricultural-related training and support to access farmland for refugees, seeds, bio briquette stoves, wander bags, and form VSLAs. About 9 out of every 10 beneficiaries are satisfied with URCS service delivery in the refugee response. To slightly over 60% of beneficiaries, URCS has to a large extent addressed the specific needs of the target communities regarding FSL. Another 14% put it to a full extent. For cassava, maize and groundnuts/, the project target of 35% of supported farmers to produce annually ≥ 10 basins of crop yield has been attained. The exception among crops targeted is beans (still at 24%).

Nearly all beneficiaries have adopted new technologies in farming and post-harvest handling.

Refugees and host communities alike express improved access to food at household level, food diversity and better physical health for household members. They not only feel empowered due to the skills they have acquired in FSL; their psychosocial lives are touched too, as expressed in reduced trauma and stress due to displacement. There are vivid cases in the villages of some members who have started their own businesses or changed their living conditions, build better houses and taken their children to school. Unintended positive consequences of this project include its contribution towards enhancing social cohesion between refugees and the host communities around the settlements.

Firewood is still reported as most common source of energy, accounting for 91.6%; briquettes and charcoal account for 5.8% and 2.5%, respectively. Majority of beneficiaries (79.1%) use Lorena stoves as their source of cooking while 27.6% still prepare their meals on openfire/3-stone facility. A notable percentage of the beneficiaries (13.8%) have wander bags to keep their cooked food warm a little longer. At baseline, nearly every household was using openfire/3-stone to prepare their meals.

Meso level

Some contribution of the project can be picked from the increasing visibility of URCS in the communities and region as a whole, arising from activities the project has undertaken in refugee settlements; most pronounced being the evident role of URCS volunteers in refugee and host communities. The URCS has not only trained various farm activities, but has also transformed farmers groups into VSLA groups and encouraged group savings. This support has made the community more self-reliant and reduced their expenses in purchasing tools for farming.

Macro level

Dissemination of URCS FSL Strategy 2021 - 2025 was undertaken during this phase. Participants were drawn from URCS staff in different branches and projects, members of branch governing boards (BGB), volunteers and other stakeholders, such as Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and Ministry of Agriculture. Overall, not much impact can be specifically attributed to the project at macro level. An opportunity was missed at onset of this phase of the project to cast out more appropriate interventions, indicators and targets necessary to leverage benefits from such a donation to the NS. To realize this, the project ought to have deliberately placed attention towards deepening engagements at strategic level to identify and allocate project resources to the most pressing needs/gaps of the NS related to institutional capacity in building resilient communities.

Project Relevance

The appropriateness of the project is reflected in its title, goal, objectives and services rendered to refugees and host communities in settlements and to URCS as an institution. Through this project, the GRC supports URCS to maximize partnerships with other humanitarian players, including the Ugandan Government, to reinforce community and household capabilities and strategies to improve FSL. Albeit on a limited scale, the project builds household resilience to respond to the climate crisis, through the energy (bio-briquette and stoves) component.

Overall, the project aligns directly with and contributes significantly to SDGs mainly to goal 2 (food security, nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), goal 7 (household energy), goal 8 (economic growth) and goal 13 (climate change). It builds on IFRC FSL programme which places

focus on restoring and reinforcing community and household capabilities to improve food security and secure livelihoods during the recovery phase, and, ultimately, building household resilience in the development phase within humanitarian contexts.

Project Efficiency and Coordination

Efficiency in terms of complete project costs are complex to compute given different actors/levels that implement significant portions of the project activities, voluntary engagements and the non-monetized project benefits. Overall, for cost efficiency, the project follows the tender/procurement practices within URCS and the Government, uses approved agencies or suppliers and their quality and design specifications. However, efficiency of the project is partly constrained by the bureaucratic process required by URCS. Consequences to the project include a few moments when a farming season was lost due to delay in delivery of seeds and implements to refugees and host community.

Overall, the project has nurtured strong interlinks in planning and community entry in the refugee settlements, community engagement on FSL and household (HH) energy among refugees and host communities, as well as training of project beneficiaries in various FSL and HH energy aspects during project implementation and monitoring.

Sustainability and capacity building

It is still work in progress to create more lasting, sustainable impact out of this project. For now, some of the pointers towards sustainable impact include self-reports from refugees of improved diversification in crop husbandry, farming for business, market links, VSLAs and adoption of new technologies and farming practices. These will stay. Changing everyone towards resilience might come slow and requires longer term support, especially given the old tradition of giving handouts which refugees were used to. Dissemination of URCS FSL strategy and the numerous engagements with national, district and agency level stakeholders on FSL programming and activity implementation have set a stage for long lasting FSL within humanitarian contexts.

Recommendations

Micro level

- During the next phase, ensure proper planning and timing for procurement and distribution of support items to project beneficiaries such as seeds and farm inputs; and also increase quantity of inputs provided to each beneficiary or group, taking into account the size of their land and planting needs
- Continue to provide additional support to refugee farmers and host communities for effective pest control solutions and for watering and protecting their plants, such as water cans. Support for irrigation may be considered.
- Invest both in receiving meteorological weather data and diligently interpreting the data to ensure that informed decisions are made to reduce on the effects of weather patterns on farming activities. Linking the URCS-GRC project to sister programs within URCS for climate and environment response preparedness could offer valuable synergy.
Strengthen community and agency level structures including VSLAs, markets along the value chain for a selected number of agricultural products, as well as networks between refugee and host communities for mutual FSL activities.

Meso level

- Continue undertaking the coordination function for FSL in humanitarian contexts across community, local governments and OPM authorities to transition refugees and host communities towards larger scale farming for more impactful FSL change
- Transition the human resource within URCS from single Project Focal Point FSL Manager currently undertaking work with blended project administration, finance and programming tasks to a bigger team deliberately structured to build synergies in FSL programming
- URCS should undertake further assessment of supply chain and management structures and processes within URCS to understand the challenges causing institutional delays and improve on timeliness of logistical and financial disbursements.
- Support the process of developing a project management system and M&E system for the entire NS to improve efficiencies in performance and reporting for this and other projects of URCS and partners

Macro level

- Refocus the next phase of the URCS-GRC project towards well thought out macro level interventions that can increase the importance and capacity of URCS as a national aid organization supporting the refugee response. This includes deepening engagements around FSL interventions in humanitarian contexts with government through OPM, Ministries of Agriculture and Environment as envisaged under the new Rd Cross Act, and with UN agencies and district local governments.
- URCS should seek more grant support from GRC and elsewhere to scale out FSL beyond the pilot project, building on lessons learned from the outgoing phase II, and strengthen the niche of URCS around building community resilience through FSL interventions.