

Northern Uganda Resilience Initiative (NURI) Contributions to pillar 3 of the JLIRP

Increasing agricultural productivity, production, and marketable volumes

The Northern Uganda Resilience Initiative (NURI) was a four-year initiative (2019-2022) financed by Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the Uganda Programme for Sustainable and Inclusive Development of the Economy (UPSIDE).

- NURI aimed to enhance the resilience and equitable economic development in supported areas of Northern Uganda, including for refugees and refugee-hosting communities.
- NURI was implemented in 13 districts in Northern Uganda, working in three areas: 1) Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA); 2) Rural Infrastructure (RI); and 3) Water Resources Management (WRM).

NURI contributed to two pillars in the Government of Uganda's Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (JLIRP). Ahead of the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, a round-table will be organised to discuss sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance in the Uganda refugee response in relation to the JLIRP. This 2-pager demonstrates relevant approaches and lessons from the NURI programme relating to Pillar 3. A separate 2-pager summarizes contributions relating to Pillar 2.



Pillar 3: Increasing agricultural productivity, production, and marketable volumes

The objective of the CSA component of the NURI programme was to increase agricultural output of refugees and host communities. By the end of the project, there was a 20% increase in annual agricultural cash income of participating households, a 22% increase in average yields, and a reduction of households reporting food insecurity. This was achieved through a combination of support to farmers groups in CSA techniques, marketing, financial literacy, training and support from agricultural extension, and Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) teams.

CSA: NURI worked with 4,388 farmers' groups, approximately 100,000 households, to improve skills in CSA. There were four types of farmers groups: 1) old national farmer groups continuing from the previous programme; 2) new national farmer groups; 3) mixed refugee/host farmer groups; and 4) women refugee farmer groups. NURI followed a field crop model with mixed refugee groups, selecting a main crop and an intercrop. Women refugee groups were supported with one food crop, three vegetable and three fruit trees, selected by the individual households, for backyard gardening and to supplement household food security. Each crop was assessed based on suitability to climate conditions, marketability, crop resistance to pests and diseases, crop yield potential and labour requirements.

Production and Marketing Plans (PMPs): National and Mixed farmer groups prepared PMPs to develop realistic production and marketing targets. NURI provided support to train marketing committees, collect and disseminate market information, link farmer groups to buyers and inputs suppliers, and encourage bulking and collective marketing of produce. By bulking and storing their produce, groups strengthened their negotiation position and took advantage of price fluctuations. Bulk prices were generally between 10-20% higher than prices for smaller quantities marketed individually.

VSLA training: To improve access to finance, all farmer groups not previously organised as savings groups were offered VSLA training. In total, 3,020 farmer groups were trained on financial literacy and VSLA methodology, starting with a process of household visioning. VSLA savings provide a financial safety net, reducing the risk of households selling productive assets during emergencies. The NURI VSLA team monitored portfolios of groups for 13 months. NURI farmer groups cumulatively saved UGX 13,6 billion with an annual growth rate in savings of 71%. Return on savings was 22.5%. Women saved more than men with their savings constituting 78% of the overall. Cumulatively, group members borrowed approximately UGX 14 billion in loans, at an interest rate of 10% per month, to fund primarily business and agricultural production. Agricultural loans made up 38% of loans taken.

Extension staff were trained on planning processes, extension methodologies, CSA, marketing, and post-harvest handling. Extension teams made household visits to reinforce learning and encourage adoption. Seed and planting equipment was given to national groups for 1-acre demo fields, and to refugees and mixed groups for demo and individual fields. NURI recruited staff with local language skills from the areas of implementation. Refugees were recruited, often as community-based trainers.

Lessons Learned

The main lessons learned from NURI relating to Pillar 3, relating to refugees and host communities are:

1. Developing a household vision can create a reinforcing cycle where planned production contributes to savings and savings finance increased production.
2. Refugees working together with host communities in farming and savings groups developed relations that led to refugees' improved access to land at no or relatively low cost.
3. VSLA is a vital part of CSA. Access to small loans and savings assist refugees and hosts to increase production, as well as dealing with shocks and household needs that affect their productive lives.
4. Flexibility in the selection of crops, integration of intercrops, and technical assistance is highly demanded by refugees and hosts but are demanding on the time and capacity of extension teams.
5. Access to and affordability of agro-inputs continues to pose a challenge to agricultural production for refugees and host communities in Northern Uganda.
6. Actively targeting refugees when recruiting staff is highly appreciated and creates good will within the refugee community.

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