

Livelihoods, our hope!

The case of Jijuka farmers group in Oruchinga refugee settlement

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“Every day we had to struggle with the prospects of living forever in Uganda without so much to call our own if peace did not return to our country.” Jijuka Farmers’ group.

Following the violence that broke out in Burundi and Congo in 2011, there was a massive influx of refugees in Uganda. Most of these refugees were settled in the South Western Districts of Uganda. As of October 2016, the number of Burundians refugees in Uganda is estimated at 29,975 persons, while that of Congolese is at 222,650 persons. In their first 5 years of settlement, the refugees were receiving 100% support in terms of food and other non-food items; however, following the policy of the Ugandan Government that encourages self-reliance, which includes reduction of food rations of refugees by 50% after 5 years, the food rations of the refugees were reduced by half. That means those that initially received 12Kgs per month were receiving only 6Kgs. The reduction in the rations was for a long time the main cause of restlessness among so many refugees, since, they did not have any viable alternative sources of food, and though they had land, they lacked the necessary support to actually cultivate it.

As a way of supporting refugees deal with the adverse effects of the reduction, and lead them to achieving self-reliance, ACORD with support from ECHO is implementing a project, *“Lifesaving Humanitarian Response for Burundian and Congolese refugees in Nakivale, Oruchinga and Rwamwanja settlements in South Western Uganda”*. The project in practice involves: training youth groups in briquette making, stove making, training women groups in making handicrafts out of solid waste materials, distribution of fruit tree, vegetable, and quick maturing crop seeds and seedlings, conducting sensitization workshops on GBV, and training community structures to address GBV issues, among others.

The different interventions under the project are targeting 15,434 refugees from all the three refugee settlements. Sustainability is generated by an emphasis on collective participation of community members; for instance, in Oruchinga Refuge settlement, 3 farmer groups comprising of 34 households per village were formed and supported as a group. The groups were supported with seeds (vegetable and quick maturing crops), fruit tree seedlings and digging tools;



Members of Jijuka farmers’ group

Though each household was given their own share of the items, they were encouraged to work as a group. One of these groups is Jijuka farmers' group (in the picture) in Rurongo A, comprised of 34(25 female and 9 males); the name "Jijuka" literally means enlightened, the vision of the group is, reduced poverty and ignorance among its members and the entire community.

Mr. Pier, the chairman of the group said, the support from ACORD/ECHO was timely following the reduction in their food rations; especially without any other alternatives to getting food.

"Every day we had to struggle with the prospects of forever living in Uganda without so much to call our own if peace did not return to our country," he noted.

"It is not easy to be a refugee; at home we had enough land and businesses, and did not have to depend on World Food Program and UN for food" he added reflecting on how things had turned out since they sought refuge in Uganda and following the reduction in their food rations.

"Here getting a job or money is really difficult, which makes it very hard for us to support our families and send our children to school" he added.

Amidst the challenges they are facing as refugees, Mr. Pier concurred that ACORD/ECHO supporting them through livelihood interventions would make them self-reliant since food was their greatest challenge, so if resolved, then their problems were half solved; to this he said,



"We were filled with joy when ACORD/ECHO came to support us, they gave us seeds (cassava, maize, ground nuts, beans, dodo, sukuma wiki, and beet root), fruit tree seedlings (oranges, Mangoes and avocado) and tools (hoes, rakes pangas and watering cans), they even trained us on how to plant the seeds, we planted them, and we are praying that rains come so they can grow well."

One of the members of the group receiving farming tools

Mr. Pier further added that:



Group members planting vegetables in the group nursery bed

“We believe that the harvest from the crops will greatly improve our lives, we shall sell some of the produce; specifically the ones from the demonstration gardens, provide for our families and provide scholastic materials for our children at school, we also hope to get empowered through this project and stop the petty fights in our homes resulting from failure to provide.”

He also revealed that inspired by ACORD’s support, the farmers’ group on their own initiative started a saving group as a sustainability measure; in view of the fact that all projects are time bound. With their savings (Ugx. 90,000= so far) they hope to give loans to their members and invest jointly a way of raising more money to support each other. They however requested ACORD to support them with training on Village Loans and Savings Associations and provide them with a saving kit.

Mr. Pier concluded by saying that, though the support rendered will change their lives, they still have challenges such as limited land, and the available one has reduced fertility which reduces productivity; and requested that if they could be supported with small ruminants such as goats, they would have been supported in two ways; because, from the goats’ droppings they would get manure to add to the soil; he also said drought still remains a big challenge, thus need to scale up nonagricultural income generation activities.

Data sources

1. DRC Regional Refugee response- information sharing portal (data.unhcr.org)
2. Operational Portal- Refugee situations (data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/burundi)

www.acordinternational.org