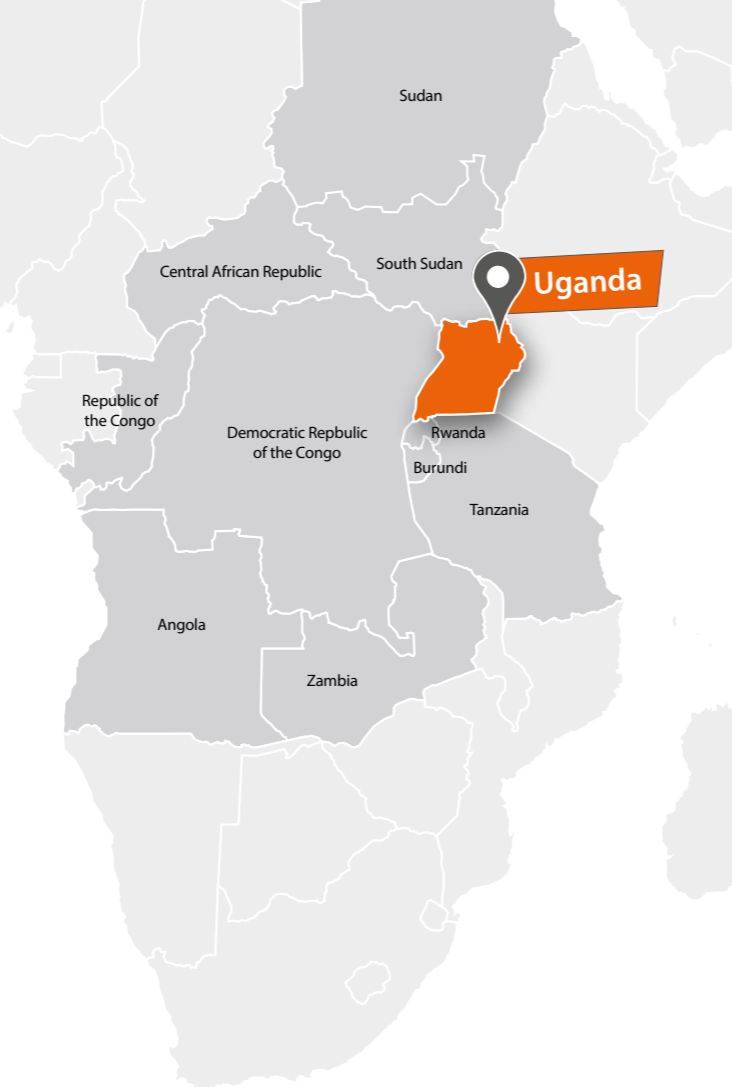


INCREASED RESILIENCE: SUPREME PROJECT, UGANDA 2020-2024

-  **PROGRAMME & PROJECT** Security, Protection and Economic Empowerment (SUPREME)
-  **SECTOR** Livelihoods
-  **TIMEFRAME** July 2020 – July 2024
-  **PEOPLE REACHED** 183,640
-  **LOCATION** Terego, Madi Okollo, Obongi and Moyo districts in north west Uganda (West Nile sub-region)
-  **PARTNERS** ZOA, SNV and local organisation RICE West Nile.
-  **DONOR** European Union
-  **GOAL** To improve overall safety and economic well-being for refugees and host communities in Northern Uganda

Context

The Security, Protection and Economic Empowerment (SUPREME) project was implemented from July 2020 to July 2024, working in the West Nile sub-region of north-west Uganda. World Vision led the SUPREME consortium, working with two international NGO partners, ZOA and SNV, and local NGO partner RICE West Nile. Project activities took place in four districts: Terego, Madi Okollo, Obongi and Moyo. These are host to around 300,000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and it is expected that they will remain in Uganda for an extended period. The refugees largely live in settlements, alongside local communities, with a small plot of land and few assets to improve their livelihoods. The local Ugandan communities living around the refugee settlements are characterised by deprivation where families struggle to provide well for their children.



Project Goal

The goal of SUPREME was to improve overall economic wellbeing for refugees and host communities in the districts of operation through: Increasing financial inclusion among savings group members; Increasing incomes from agricultural products and other enterprises and increasing employment among young people.

The project was centred around the following groups of activities:

-  **Savings & Development Clusters (SDC).** Supporting 800 existing and 200 newly formed groups meeting weekly to save money, take out small loans and improve the livelihoods of members.
-  **Enabling Rural Innovation (ERI) approach.** Working with SDCs to strengthen business skills and promote the transition from subsistence agriculture to a more market-focused business approach to agriculture while safeguarding food security and the sustainable management of natural resources.

-  **Opportunities for Youth Employment (OYE) model.** Supporting youth by providing vocational and business skills and working with local providers for coaching, mentoring and job placements.
-  **Economic stimulus approach.** Providing grants for each of the 1,000 SDCs to boost their savings pot, Enterprise Development grants to 764 SDC members, and a Challenge Fund for private sector businesses to invest in services that benefit local and refugee communities.
-  **Private sector development.** Market systems approaches address the root causes of why markets often fail to meet the needs of deprived communities.
-  **Climate Smart Agriculture and Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) approach.** Supporting farmers to use sustainable agricultural methods and adapt to climate change, and provide training in reforestation to subsistence farmers, increasing food production and resilience to climate extremes.

Results

SUPREME used three indicators to track progress towards the goal:

- **Composite Productive Assets Index (CPAI)**
- **Average number of income-generating activities per household**
- **Coping Strategy Index Score (CSIS)**

CPAI is an index based on the number of assets a household has that can be liquidated in the event of crisis, emergency or financial obligation. A higher index (between zero and 1) indicates a household is better able to manage in difficult times, and therefore more resilient to shocks and stresses. At baseline, the overall index for refugee and local communities was 0.081, with a target set for the end of the project of 0.187. Project evaluation showed that the CPAI had risen to 0.547, indicating a significant positive impact on participants.

At baseline, the average number of income-generating activities per household was 0.214, with a target of 0.49. Project evaluation revealed a significant increase to 2.159. This demonstrates that participating households had at least two different ways of earning income, building their resilience.

CSIS is an indicator of household food security that assesses the extent to which households use harmful coping strategies when they do not have enough food or

money to buy food. A high score means an extensive use of negative coping strategies. At baseline, this index was at 5.8, with a target of 2.9 by the end of the project. Evaluation showed that the index fell to 2.8, a slightly bigger fall than the target set. However, there was a considerable difference between the refugee and local communities, with the figure for local communities falling from 6.3 to 2.4, whereas for refugee communities it fell from 5.6 to only 3.7. This demonstrates that although the need for negative coping strategies among both communities had fallen, it was much less the case with the refugee population.

“When we came, we left most of our things there in South Sudan. Starting life, it was not easy. We were given an opportunity to write a business plan. The poultry project I began is now helping me at home. The community is benefitting - the knowledge that I have I also share with them. Working with the SUPREME project, all the training, the knowledge, the materials - they have really supported us.” (Moses, project participant.)

ABOVE: Moses a project participant, with his family. ©2024 World Vision



Ruth's story

At 19, Ruth (pictured) stood on the precipice of dropping out of school, facing the overwhelming challenge of raising funds for her school fees. In 2018, Ruth found hope when she joined L&J Enterprises, a refugee-led initiative that offered training in tailoring. She acquired the clothes-making skills but struggled to kickstart her tailoring journey.

When the SUPREME project began, L&J Enterprises received training in goal setting, life skills, financial literacy, and savings for transformation. Later, they were provided savings kits to embark on their path to economic transformation. Knowing that education was her way out, Ruth was determined not to become a teenage mother like many others in her village, and now has the skills she needs for a successful life.



Project success

In addition to these goal level indicators, the project also increased financial inclusion and social cohesion among Savings and Development Clusters (SDCs); developed sustainable agricultural value chains and non-agricultural enterprises; linked young women and men from SDC member households to job opportunities.

There was a significant increase in the following:



At the beginning of the project, only 21% of households involved were investing in income generating activities, but this **increased to 94% by the end of the project.**

The percentage of those engaged in the project who were employed or had their own business increased from **25% to 78% by the end of the project.**

The number of households who saved part of their incomes increased from **52% at the beginning of the project to 96% at the end.**



Conclusion

The SUPREME project overcame some difficult challenges, in what is a complex operating environment to achieve significant success in improving the wellbeing of both refugee and local communities in north western Uganda. The increase in households who are now able to save money regularly, are now employed or have their own business, and are able to invest in income generating activities has enabled many households to lift themselves out of extreme poverty. Poverty, environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change remain challenging, but the skills, knowledge and networks fostered by SUPREME have provided a strong starting point for these households and communities to build their livelihoods and lift themselves further out of poverty

Learning

The project faced a number of challenges during implementation, including the Covid pandemic, which disrupted much of the first two years. Many adaptations had to be made to the way the project operated.

Other challenges included:

- **Limited land for agriculture among refugee communities.** Refugees are allocated 900 square metre plots for housing and farming. This limited their ability

to expand farming practices so some hired expensive land for farming. In response, the project formed mixed SDCs (refugees and locals) and facilitated meetings with landlords to reduce costs.

- **Lack of startup capital for youth.** Youth faced a major challenge with lack of capital to fully invest in their businesses. This slowed the achievement of youth starting up their small businesses after being empowered with the relevant knowledge and skills.
- **Prolonged dry spells.** There were prolonged dry spells which affected farm operations and ultimately limited yields. In response, the project promoted drought tolerant crop varieties and trained project participants on climate smart agricultural practices as well as FMNR which supports the regeneration of the soil structure.
- **Security and financial management concerns.** There were reported cases of misuse of grant funds including block grants. In some instances, SDC members who borrowed from groups failed to repay, risking group closure. As a result, the project trained and mentored SDCs on proper grant use and management.

We also learned a number of lessons to take into future programming, including:

- The formation of mixed SDC groups has promoted social cohesion among members. Evaluation revealed increased trust and confidence between host and refugee groups.



- Financial inclusion for vulnerable populations requires alternative mechanisms. Barriers to banking services faced by refugees highlighted the need for alternative financial mechanisms, such as mobile cash transfers, to ensure their inclusion in economic initiatives.
- Women's involvement accelerates impact. Women formed the majority of participants in the project. Their participation in project interventions fostered community involvement and ownership. This catalysed success of many initiatives due to their loyalty and active participation. It was encouraging to see the high participation of women in all project activities, such as the SDC savings groups.
- Farmer visits were effective in enhancing the adoption of best practices in farming. This approach enhances practical learning on different production strategies, technologies and crop varieties, and the rate of adoption is high. It also encourages peer-to-peer learning for sustainability.
- Grants were set at an appropriate level for participants who also contributed some of their own resources, this increased their ownership of the activities and made them more effective.

ABOVE: Ruth and fellow members of L&J Tailoring Enterprises Omugo refugee settlement, Northern Uganda.
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Recommendations

Involve the private sector in programmes to help young people develop skills for employment. Qualitative data and document reviews revealed that Uganda is a private sector led economy which employs many youths. A Uganda Bureau of Statistics report shows that the private sector employs the largest number of people. Interventions aimed at upskilling youth should be designed in partnership with the private sector. In future, before any intervention aimed at improving employable skills is implemented, a gap assessment should be conducted to determine which skills are lacking and to what degree.

The evaluation revealed that the mixed group approach was critical in fostering community cohesion and social inclusion and as such accelerated achievement of project results.

The project was not pro-actively designed to include issues of disability during its design. As much as there were traces of disability involvement in the project interventions, it is important that this is streamlined and integrated within project design documents.



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COVER PHOTO: Ruth, a project participant with her sewing machine. ©2024 Brian Jakisa Mungu/World Vision