

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT(WID) PROJECT IN WEST NILE REGION

UCAA is a local actor promoting the participation of rural communities in the decision-making and supporting poor communities, especially women, to engage in viable economic activities for sustainable development. Since 2015, UCAA has been a partner in Women's Bank funded projects through FinnchurchAid. The WID project is an extension of the 2015 - 2017 Women Empowerment project, also supported by Women's Bank Finland that was implemented in Gulu and Oyam districts of Northern Uganda.

The Women In Development project's specific objective is to support *"poor women in refugee host communities of Yumbe and Arua districts become economically self-reliant through better access to local affordable financial services and understanding of their rights"*.

The WID project contributes to women's socio-economic empowerment by building their skills in leadership, identification and planning of income generating activities and by doing so, women become aware of their economic strength, abilities, opportunities and rights, which in turn builds their skills and potentials to take active roles in their communities. The project strives to ensure that the targeted women are enterprising, access local affordable financial services and are right-sensitive active citizens by 2020. The project enables beneficiaries and their families to build secure, sustainable and resilient livelihoods, while gaining skills and confidence to move forward with hope. The *Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA)* methodology is employed to equip beneficiaries with tools, livelihoods and self-confidence to sustain themselves when the project phases out.

The project areas, Yumbe and Arua districts, are located in the West Nile Region Uganda facing the border with South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo. In both districts, poverty level is very high and people derive their livelihood mainly from agriculture. The influx of refugees fleeing the conflict in South Sudan is putting a further strain on the region. While working mainly with Ugandan women, the project also seeks to find feasible ways to involve refugees in the project.

Finnish Vicars Visits

On 22nd January 2019, UCAA hosted 15 Finnish Vicars Under the Women in Development Project in Yumbe District. The visitors had a team of 6 FCA staff Kampala and Yumbe, plus 5 UCAA staff and one change agent. Two women groups in Romogi Sub County were visited. The groups were **Uchiku women's group** in Kurunga village, and **Indregogo women's group** in Kulupi village both in Chabili parish, Romogi subcounty, Yumbe District.

The total number of women met from the two groups totaled to 57 and 6 men of which 1 was the LC1 chairperson of Kulupi village, 2 men in Kurunga village were husbands to the supported women and 3 in Kulupi village were also husbands to the women.

The visit of the Finnish Vicars brought a lot of joy and happiness and it's a motivation factor to the visited beneficiary groups. This also leaves the women with hope and encouragement.

Stake holder involvement during activity execution

a) The Finnish Vicars team, FCA staff and UCAA staff payed a courtesy call at Yumbe District Local Governnet and interacted with some district leaders. The meeting and interaction was held in the office of the District Chairman LCV.

The Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the district welcomed the the team from Finland, the Womens Bank, Fin church Aid and UCAA as well. He apologized on behalf of CAO that he was not able to meet with the visitors because he had another meeting in Kampala. He appreciated the good work that UCAA has done in Yumbe within a short time and thanked Woman bank and Fin Church Aid for the support.

He said that Yumbe District is happy to have been chosen for support and said that West Nile comes second in Uganda in terms of Poverty levels after Karamoja Region. He also appreciated the support to women and said women are the core members for development in households.

He appreciated the Finnish Vicars for taking initiative to reach the ground where grassroot people are supported, this encourages partners and the women to continue working hard. He wished them a nice stay in Yumbe and a safe travel back home as they leave.

b) During the visit in the groups, the Local Council one Chair Person of Kurunga village welcomed the vistoris and told them to feel at home. He expressed his gratitude and said that they were very happy to host them in their village and could not believe that they have visitors all the way from Finland.

On the other hand, the LC1 Chair Person of Kulupi village welcomed the visitors and thanked them for the support they have given to the women. He said he has been able to see a lot of changes in the womens lives within a short time of the project and believes that the community will have benefitted much more by the end of the project. He asked them to feel at home as they interact with the community and wished them a safe journey back home as they go back.

c) The women under support in **Uchiku Women's group**, Kurunga Village were represented by their Chair Person, **Mrs Drakai Faima**. She gave a report about the group. She explained how they were selected, and what they have benefited so far including the number of capacity building trainings they have attended. She listed them as; VSLA trainings, Leadership and Management Trainings, Improved Agricultural Practices plus Functional Adult Literacy (FAL). She then invited the group record keeper,

Mrs Tiko zura to read the financial summary report of the group. She then read the savings as follows; Total Savings **1, 376,000/-** (One million, three hundred seventy six thousand shillings), Social Fund of **162,000/-** (One hundred sixty two thousand shillings) and the Loan out of **500,000/-** (Five hundred thousand shillings).

The Chair Person of Uchiku Women's group appreciated that all the women in the group are out spoken, able to express themselves and can discuss issues and share their views in different community meetings, unlike before where they would hide away from people and community meetings.

d) In Indregogo Women's group the chairperson also gave a report about the group. She asked the group leaders to introduce themselves. She expressed how happy and joyful she was to have the visitors all the way from finland to Kulupi village. She said this had never happened in their village before. She thanked Women's Bank, Fin Church Aid and UCAA for supporting them. She gave a brief report about what they had achieved and listed the trainings that they received including VSLA training, leadership training ,enterpernushsip and enterprise selection traning and the on going Functional Adult Literacy traning (FAL). She said that the VSLA methodology has improved household incomes and wellbeing. She said that before the project, most of them used to request for money for up keep from their husbands on a daily basis, however, this has now stopped, women are able to raise money for home use as well as savings. She also said that their husbands are happy about the project and they have promised to support them to develop their households together. She reported that the group has so far accumulated total Savings, **1,614,000/-** (One million six hundred fourteen thousand shillings), Social Fund, **314, 600/-** (Three hundred fourteen thousand six hundred shillings), Loan Out, **781,000/-** (Seven hundred eighty one thousand shillings).

She concluded by informing visitors that on a **sad note**, they lost their secretary (record keeper) in December 2018, and the husband decided to take on the position and he has continued to save with them.

Activity content including cross cutting issues addressed during the execution.

Activity content included the following.

Winnie Kutamba (Program Officer FCA) thanked them for having joined the project and attending the trainings. She thanked them for embracing the project. She informed them that FCA is implementing many other projects in both the refugee camps and the host communitites regarding livelihood support, health and education and was glad that the people of West Nile are embracing the projects and giving them support during implementation. She appreciated the warm welcome. She also explained to the visitors how UCAA is supporting the groups by buying them saving boxes, pass books, stamps,

calculators and give them trainings that have improved women skills in the different groups that they work with. She thanked UCAA for the commitment and good work that they are delivering. It is visible that lives of the supported women and their household members has improved.

Winnie, on behalf of the whole team extended condolences to the group and the husband of the late secretary for having lost a very important person, the record keeper of the group. She thanked the husband of the late for having taken up the shares of his late wife.

She then called upon the visitors' representative to talk to the women.

The female Finnish vicar gave her remarks on behalf of Women's Bank Finland. She thanked all the women from both Uchiku Women's group and Indergogo Women's group for the warm and wonderful welcome they gave to them. She said they were really feeling at home. She also told the women that they are not strangers but they are their sisters and brothers from Finland who think about them so much.

She said they were so amazed by the reports of their savings within a short period of time which shows their hard work. She said will go back home and share with other members at home in Finland the good thing they have seen in the group. She said that back in Finland they know that the role of a woman in a society is very important and also know it's the same here in Uganda. That's why they have chosen to empower the women who will empower the whole community as well.

She also introduced the male (men) vicars and explained to the beneficiaries how they also support them in raising funds through Women's Bank to support the different women in Africa through different projects. She told the women that they have created memories in them and will always keep them in their hearts. They are a good example to their homes and community and they will take the news back to their country.

She concluded that on behalf of Women's Bank Finland and Fin Church Aid, they wish them all the best for their children and family. She then invited the male vicars to present their anthem to the groups.

Environmental risks

West Nile is known for hot unfavourable weather (drought) that affects agricultural practices. To mitigate the above, UCAA is conducting Improved agricultural practices through the Yumbe and Arua District Agricultural Extension Workers. The women are being sensitized on mainstreaming climate change. They are expected to adopt seasonal planting and better agricultural practices such as crop rotation, planting drought resistant crops, practicing simple irrigation methods using the streams close to their village.

Gender equality issues.

UCAA conducts sensitisations on gender issues and culture. This will reduce the tendency of men thinking that women will over power them when they are supported. Most of the husbands have understood this and have embraced the project and are working positively with their wives towards the development in their household.

Involvement of duty bearers.

UCAA works with and involves the local leaders in all stages of her implementation. They are kept updated about all activivites going on in the districts and periodic reports are always shared accordingly. UCAA will continue to take different approaches to involve these duty bearers and the rights holders to participate in project activities and also in addressing emerging issues and any other issues in the due course of the project period depending on their nature.

Conclusion

Generally, the monitoring visit was successful. The local leaders, supported women and some husbands actively participated in the visit. The visitors (Finnish Vicars) appreciated the work done by UCAA.



The photo on the left show the Finnish Vicar visitors while in the office of the District Chairperson in Yumbe District, while in the middle and right they were welcomed and hosted by Uchiku Women's Group.



Photos above show the interaction of Finnish Vicars with the supported Women in the WID project.



The above photos show the Finnish Vicars as they visited the groups and they sung for them. The right photo at the extreme end is a group photo for the visitors, FCA staff and UCAA staff .