



**EAST, HORN OF AFRICA AND GREAT LAKES (EHAGL) REGION
GENDER EQUALITY PROMISING PRACTICES 2024**

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ACRONYMS AND OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity
CBP	Community-Based Protection
CBI	Cash-Based Interventions
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo / Danish Refugee Council (context-dependent)
EHAGL	East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGAs	Income-Generating Activities
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
RLO	Refugee-Led Organization
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WGSS	Women and Girls Safe Spaces

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INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a foundational element of UNHCR's protection mandate and a critical pathway to realizing the rights and dignity of forcibly displaced and stateless people. In the East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes (EHAGL) region, displaced women and girls continue to face deeply rooted structural inequalities. These include heightened exposure to Gender-Based Violence (GBV), restricted access to decision-making spaces, and limited livelihood opportunities. Such disparities are often magnified in displacement contexts, where social systems are disrupted and resources overstretched.

Recognizing these challenges, UNHCR operations across the EHAGL region have taken deliberate steps to promote gender equality and inclusion. Guided by the 2018, Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Policy and the Global Strategic Directions 2022–2026, these efforts aim to dismantle discriminatory gender norms and foster transformative change through inclusive programming. The goal is not only to protect but to empower, ensuring that women and girls are active agents in shaping their futures and the humanitarian response that serves them.

This documentation brings together a diverse collection of **promising practices** that reflect the region's commitment to gender-transformative action. These practices span a wide range of thematic areas, including:

- Women's economic empowerment through innovative livelihood initiatives.
- GBV prevention and response strategies tailored to displacement settings.
- Inclusive education models that promote equal access and retention for girls.
- Leadership and participation opportunities for women and girls in community governance and decision-making.

Each example presented is grounded in local realities and reflects the creativity, resilience, and leadership of displaced communities. Together, they demonstrate how humanitarian actors can move beyond gender-sensitive approaches to embrace truly gender-transformative programming that not only addresses immediate protection needs but also contributes to long-term social change.

As we continue to build on these efforts, it is essential to document, share, and learn from what works. This publication serves as a resource for practitioners, policymakers, and partners committed to advancing gender equality in humanitarian settings. It is a testament to the power of inclusive action and a call to deepen our collective resolve to ensure that no one is left behind.

RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this documentation is to showcase promising gender equality practices from across the EHAGL region, promote cross-learning, and support replication of effective interventions in other contexts. These practices reflect the collective efforts of UNHCR operations and partners to operationalize the Age Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach and strengthen gender-responsive programming.

The methodology employed to identify and document these practices included:

- **Call for Submissions:** Field operations were invited to submit practices demonstrating impact in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly those with potential for replication.
- **Screening and Review:** Submissions were reviewed using criteria aligned with the UNHCR Methodology on Collecting Practices and Case Studies. Practices were assessed based on various aspects including relevance, innovation, participation, scalability, and transformative potential.
- **Data Sources:** Information was collected from operational reports, partner documentation, focus group discussions, interviews, and monitoring tools.
- **Validation and Consolidation:** Practices were reviewed by country and regional technical experts in gender equality, protection, community-based protection, and relevant sectors for quality assurance and consistency.

The result is a curated selection of field-tested interventions that challenge harmful gender norms, support meaningful participation of women and girls, and advance protection and inclusion across sectors. This publication aims to inspire replication, adaptation, and scale-up of such efforts throughout the region and beyond.

GENDER EQUALITY PROMISING PRACTICES

UGANDA COUNTRY OPERATION

1.HOPE RESTORED: EMPOWERING CHILD MOTHERS THROUGH EDUCATION IN ARUA

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

UNHCR and partners continue to record increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies affecting South Sudanese and Congolese refugee girls and girls in the host community. In the year 2024, over 1,641 cases of teenage pregnancies were recorded in Arua operation in Uganda. The situation is exacerbated by the negative cultural norms that promote early marriages and gender-based violence, coupled with poverty, poor parenting, inadequate access to information regarding sexual and reproductive health and limited access to education that hinder young people from realizing their full potential. Generally, once a girl becomes a teenager and attends her first menstrual period, she is deemed ready for marriage and in some of the cultures in South Sudan, a red flag is hung on top of the house to alert the community that there is a 'mature' girl in the household, which means that they are ready for marriage regardless of their age.

UNHCR and partners identified cases of the child mothers aged between 13 years and 17 years during daily case management activities. Most of these teenagers have stopped their education at the primary school level. The young mothers reported to have either lost hope in life, experiencing stigma from their parents and caregivers, or have developed mental health dysfunctions including depression and suicidal ideations. The cases of teenage pregnancy were also discussed during the Child Protection (CP)/ GBV working group meetings where partners suggested second chance education programs.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

- Child Protection working group partners identified cases of teenage pregnancies and child mothers in the settlements. This was undertaken in collaboration with health partners who documented all the teenage mothers that visited health centers for antenatal care.
- Needs assessment and counseling for the girls was undertaken to determine their interests and willingness to resume schooling and attain critical life skills.
- In 2024, Fifteen (15) adolescent girls were referred to 'Child Voice' an operational partner in Imvepi settlement.
- The girls were recruited into a vocational center in Gulu where they received both educational and vocational skills training through UNHCR support.
- In collaboration with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Spotlight Program, UNHCR supported over 100 adolescents and young girls both in and out of educational institutions.
- Twenty-two (22) teenage mothers with limited prospects of returning to school, were identified with the assistance of community structures to participate in the adolescent life skills program.
- The program established 3 fully furnished baby spaces in 3 schools, and a caregiver was identified to care for the babies as the mothers attended to classes.



Delivery of assorted skills delivery materials courtesy of child voice -Arua @Julius- child voice.

RESULTS

- 37 child mothers returned to school in 2024 and are performing very well. This has encouraged other child mothers to self-refer for the same support.
- The mental well-being of the child mothers has improved greatly as reported by the MHPSS partner involved in case management.
- The child mothers have had sessions with other young girls to talk about the dangers of teenage pregnancy and the need to stay in school.

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

Considering that many young girls continue facing GBV including Early or forced marriage, rape, denial of opportunities, the operation plans to mobilize funds to set up more programs that can accommodate second chance education.

2.ONE DOOR AT A TIME: RAISING GBV AWARENESS IN PALORINYA REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

In Palorinya Refugee Settlement, Uganda, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) awareness efforts were traditionally conducted through large community meetings held in common spaces such as halls or open grounds. However, this approach presented several challenges that limited its effectiveness. There was Low attendance, especially from women and mothers who were occupied with childcare and domestic responsibilities. Moreover, many residents lived far from the meeting points, making it difficult for them to attend. On the other hand, community expectations that any organized gathering would either provide refreshments or remuneration led to hesitation among community activists to conduct sessions without such provisions.

These issues led to limited reach and inconsistent community engagement in GBV sensitization efforts. The problem was formally recognized during quarterly review meetings with Male Action Groups (MAGs) and Community Activists (CAs). They reported that logistical and cultural barriers were preventing consistent participation in GBV meetings and proposed a door-to-door outreach model as a more responsive and inclusive alternative. This method would not only ensure broader household-level engagement but also allow MAGs and CAs to observe household dynamics firsthand and discreetly identify and refer GBV cases for further support. UNHCR and Lutheran World Federation (LWF) supported the adoption of Door-to-door sensitization and has since emerged as a practical, community-friendly solution that bridges the participation gap, built rapport at the household level, and provided a pathway for early detection and referral of GBV survivors to specialized service providers.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

UNHCR, in partnership with Lutheran World Federation (LWF), implemented a localized, community-driven approach through:

- **Community selection of activists**-The Community Activists (CAs) and Male Action Groups (MAGs) were identified by communities through organized community meetings for selection of the CAs and MAGs
- **Capacity building**-The CAs and MAGs were oriented into GBV prevention approaches which included Local Activism, SASA theater plays and analysis of negative use of power between men and women.
- **Provision of materials**-The Activists and Male Action Group members were provided with GBV awareness and sensitization materials including power posters, quick chats and game chats for use during their community engagements sessions.
- **Ongoing engagements**-Currently there are 100 community Activists and 50 Male Action group members who facilitate GBV prevention awareness, Case identification and reporting of GBV cases to staff for management and response.

RESULTS

- In 2024, 7,590 (2,983F: 4,607M) community members were reached with GBV awareness messages through door-to-door sensitization by MAGs and CAs
- Identification and referral of GBV cases. This came as an unintended outcome because the initial plan for door-to-door GBV awareness was to simply share information but as the MAGs and CAs continued to engage at household level, some community members could report cases to them and seek help to address some of the GBV case management needs

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

Since Door to Door GBV awareness allows collective household approach to home based GBV prevention, protection and awareness, the program team plans to conduct more outreaches in affected areas throughout the year.

3. DRAMA THERAPY FOR TRAUMA RECOVERY IN KYAKA II REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Each year, partners continue to record an increasing number of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases. In 2024, Alight, a UNHCR implementing partner, recorded a total of 442 GBV incidents. Psychological and emotional violence was the most prevalent, accounting for 39% of reported cases, followed by denial of resources and economic violence at 29%. The persistence of GBV is attributed to deeply entrenched cultural norms that uphold male superiority at the expense of women and girls. Additionally, prevalent poverty levels and limited opportunities have further exacerbated the issue. Before UNHCR and its partners intervened, the Kyaka II Refugee Settlement was a community shrouded in silence. Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) rarely spoke about their experiences due to cultural stigma and fear of judgment. Women endured their suffering in isolation, burdened by shame and loneliness. The trauma of SGBV manifested in sleepless nights, anxiety, and emotional numbness. Survivors struggled without access to effective psychosocial support, further deepening their distress. Economic dependence further compounded their vulnerability, leaving women, trapped in cycles of poverty and abuse. Harmful gender norms normalized violence against women, and the lack of community awareness perpetuated cycles of inequality. Survivors felt isolated, with no structured support systems to turn to.

This problem was identified through community engagement forums, where women began to share their stories. Formal studies and reports revealed alarming statistics: over 60% of women in the settlement had experienced GBV, yet fewer than 20% had accessed psychosocial support. Interagency forums and case documentation further highlighted the widespread nature of the crisis, with survivors illustrating the real-life impact of unaddressed trauma and economic vulnerability. Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) also played a crucial role in identifying the problem, as facilitators noticed the recurring theme of unexpressed pain among survivors.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

- **Listening to the Voices of the Community:** The intervention began with community engagement forums, where women bravely shared their stories. These forums revealed a pattern of unaddressed trauma, silence around GBV, and a lack of access to psychosocial support.
- **Gathering the Data:** Surveys and assessments revealed that over 60% of women had experienced GBV, prompting UNHCR to build a coalition of support with local NGOs, community-based organizations, and government agencies.
- **Designing the Intervention.** The program was designed to be holistic, integrating drama therapy with psychosocial support, legal aid, and economic empowerment initiatives. Facilitators were trained in drama therapy techniques, trauma-informed care, and gender sensitivity.
- **Launching the Drama Therapy Program.** The program was launched within the Women and Girls Safe Spaces, where participants engaged in role-playing, storytelling, and improvisation, providing a safe outlet for emotional expression.

- **Integrating with Other Services.** The program was integrated with other services, including counselling, legal aid, and economic empowerment programs like tailoring and baking. Awareness campaigns engaged men and boys in GBV prevention, fostering a community-wide shift in attitudes.
- **Monitoring and Learning.** The program was continuously monitored and improved based on feedback from participants. As the program progressed, it was scaled up, with additional funding and resources secured to reach more survivors.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- **Emotional Healing and Trauma Recovery.** Drama therapy provided a safe space for emotional healing, with participants reporting reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety amongst affected women and girls. Survivors regained their self-esteem and confidence, with many, joining economic empowerment programs and gaining financial independence.
- **Economic Empowerment and Independence.** Economic empowerment initiatives, such as tailoring and baking, enabled women to generate income and regain control over their lives. Many participants reported generating income through their new skills, reducing their economic dependence on others.



Beneficiaries from Kakoni Women and girls Safe space showing some of their work as others continue to practice tailoring skills. © UNHCR

- **Strengthened Social Bonds and Community Support.** The program also strengthened social bonds, as women formed support networks that provided a sense of belonging and mutual encouragement. Community awareness campaigns led to a shift in attitudes, with men and boys becoming more engaged in GBV prevention.
- **Improved Mental Health and Well-Being.** The combination of drama therapy, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment led to significant improvements in the

mental health and overall well-being of the participants. Most participants reported improved mental health, including reduced anxiety, better sleep, and a more positive outlook on life.



Alight interpreter supporting a therapy group of Kinyabwisha speaking women during FGDs at Bwiriza women and girls' safe space @ UNHCR.

- **Community Awareness and Advocacy.** The collective performances created by the drama therapy groups were shared with the wider community, raising awareness about GBV and challenging harmful gender norms. Men and boys became more engaged in GBV prevention, and the community became more supportive of survivors.
- **Referral and Access to Specialized Services.** The program also facilitated referrals to specialized mental health services for those in need of more intensive support. Survivors who needed specialized services, such as trauma counselling or medical care, were able to access them through the program.

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

- **Increased Male Engagement in GBV Prevention.** One of the most unexpected outcomes was the significant increase in male engagement in GBV prevention efforts. Men began attending community awareness sessions and even participated in drama therapy performances, challenging harmful gender norms and advocating for gender equality.
- **Strengthened Intergenerational Bonds:** Older women, who initially struggled to participate in the program due to slow learning processes, began sending their grandchildren and children to attend the training sessions on their behalf.

- **Emergence of Women-Led Community Initiatives.** The program inspired women to take the lead in initiating community projects and advocacy efforts. Empowered by their newfound skills and confidence, some participants began organizing their own initiatives to address community issues.
- **Improved Community Cohesion and Trust:** The program fostered a sense of unity and trust within the community, which was an unexpected but welcome outcome. As women and girls began to heal and regain their confidence, they became more active in community activities, bridging divides and building stronger social networks.
- **Increased Demand for Adult Literacy Programs:** The program also sparked an unexpected demand for adult literacy programs. Many women who participated in the tailoring and drama therapy programs expressed a desire to learn how to read and write, recognizing the importance of literacy for their economic and personal development.

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

- **Scaling Up Within Uganda:** Given the existing situation, UNHCR and its partners are planning to expand the program to cover all the communities and even expand to other refugee settlements in Uganda where similar challenges of trauma, gender inequality, and SGBV persist.
- **Integration into National Policies and Programs:** UNHCR and partners are advocating for the integration of the drama therapy and empowerment model into national policies and programs, ensuring its long-term sustainability and impact.

4. ADVANCING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH SPORT-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN ORUCHINGA

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The youth in Oruchinga Refugee Settlement form 30% of the total population and they face significant challenges of redundancy due to limited support for recreational activities such as soccer, music, dance, and drama, coupled with the absence of a youth center and livelihood support services. This lack of engagement has led to negative outcomes such as theft and drug abuse. Furthermore, due to economic shocks in Uganda, youth remain highly vulnerable and often lack the resources to access sport/soccer equipment and other materials necessary to participate in recreational activities, which could play a critical role in addressing the challenges associated with idleness, besides building confidence and providing opportunity for skills development and challenging gender stereotypes.

During implementation, women and girls tend to participate less in recreational activities such as football and basketball matches, as men are often given priority. This disparity is largely attributed to cultural norms and practices that limit opportunities for women and girls to engage in such activities. Most times the female counter parts are engaged in domestic chores giving them less opportunities for full participation. This is evident from the football tournament conducted in June 2024 in which 85% of the participants were male.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

- ALIGHT the UNHCR partner raised awareness on youth focused activities emphasizing on sport for Gender equality following the low participation of the females in the June 2024 tournament.
- The partner worked closely with the community structures from both refugee and host communities who supported in the mobilization of participants in Kifunjo, Busheka, Rurongo, Michinga and Kafunjo zones where 220 (70F/150M) participants were reached.
- Male and female captains of football, basketball, and netball teams from both communities formally wrote to the partner, requesting a meeting to discuss further about youth engagement activities.
- In the meeting, captains proposed to be facilitated in soccer (football and basketball matches) specifically for women, noting that the previous tournaments held in the year 2024 had focused solely on men. This initiative aligned with the core principles of community empowerment and inclusivity aimed at strengthening peaceful coexistence through sports while promoting gender inclusivity, community ownership and peaceful co-existence between the two communities.
- Upon identification of the youth focused/engagement activities (female football and basketball), the partner developed a Terms of Reference (ToR), for the implementation of the project through the Settlement play group.
- Four teams (Two from the host community and Two from the displaced communities), referees and umpires were selected to participate in the football matches which were officiated by OPM (Office of the Prime Minister). The selection in this round of matches saw a **49% representation** of female participants compared to the 15% realized previously.
- During the tournament, the partner passed on key information on gender equality, peaceful coexistence, self-awareness, encouraging the participants to use the opportunity to gain confidence, teamwork, leadership skills, friendship and resilience among women and girls.



Key information sharing to teams by partners during a soccer match at Kisoro ground @UNHCR

EXPECTED OUTCOME

- From the period June 2023 to the end of 2024 there was an increase in female participation and young girls showing interest to train in particular sports like soccer and basketball which was previously seen to be a boys/men's games.
- Currently Oruchinga has a female Basketball team (Oruchinga Basketball club), 2 female football teams (Busheka and Rwamurunga football clubs) and 1 female volley team in Kisoro. These teams have since been engaged in friendly games within Oruchinga and in Nakivale.

"My name is Nya Sandé Martha, 19 years old, a Sudanese refugee currently staying in Kisoro village, Oruchinga refugee settlement. Allow me to take this opportunity to deeply appreciate ALIGHT (UNHCR partner) for having supported sports for gender equality, I respect the fact that you heard us and responded to our need when we called on you and notified you that we had been left behind, with only male games being facilitated as attributed to our cultures. My teammates and I do not take this opportunity for granted. We feel empowered socially because you have built our confidence, self-esteem and you have also made us realize our talents and our capabilities. We can proudly stand out on our own to play with other teams given a chance. This opportunity has not only helped us showcase our talents, but it has helped us to realize our worth and disapproved the community perception about culture, women and soccer games. We are also pleased to have interacted and built friendship with girls from the host community, ultimately promoting peaceful coexistence and gender equality"



Female basketball match between refugees and the host community at Kisoro Playgrounds in Oruchinga @UNHCR

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

There currently exist challenges including, lack of sport items/equipment's like balls, Nets and limited numbers of playgrounds among others. In addition, Oruchinga has only one basketball court that needs rehabilitation. With continued funding and support from partners, these activities will continue to be implemented so that more girls and youth are reached.

5.ENHACING ACCESS TO WOMEN SAFE SPACES IN KYANGWALI REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

In 2018, when Kyangwali settlement had a refugee influx from DRC, the Maratatu zone was the area where the new arrivals were settled. GBV Partners including CARE International in Uganda, lobbied for funding and constructed 5 semi-permanent women and girls' safe spaces in the villages of Mombasa, Kavule, Maratatu A, C and D. From 2018 to date, the population of refugees in Kyangwali has grown from 36000 to 145, 279. Females make 53% (76,990) of the total population, while 49,740 of them are woman at risk. As the population grew bigger, the women and girls in the other parts of the settlement could not access the women and girls' safe spaces. Due to this, in the year 2020, UNHCR, under direct funding constructed women center in Namaganda village which is approximately 10 kilometers from the villages where the 5 initial centers were constructed. This center is functional and draws women and girls from surrounding villages. Considering that Kyangwali continued to receive new arrivals, new villages like Bukinda and Malembo were established between 2023-2024. Women in these new villages could not access the existing centers and this thus prompted the idea to extend similar services out of the centers.

UNHCR GBV focal point supported the GBV partner, Alight in conducting listening sessions for the women at the center on a quarterly basis. During these listening sessions, the few women who came from Mukunyu, Malembo, and Bukinda villages expressed difficulty in coming to the center due to the long distance (approx. 3-5 Km) amidst the care responsibilities at home. The women recommended to have additional women centers constructed in their villages.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

- UNHCR and partner (Alight) received complaints about the inaccessibility of the women safe spaces (centers) by several women in different villages.
- UNHCR and partner conducted 2 consultation meeting with women and girls in the villages of Bukinda and Malembo in October 2023 to assess their opinion and choices regarding the existing community assets including churches, community centers, schools, protection desk, meeting shades in the community among others. Key issues women considered during the selection of the venue was confidentiality and safety, limited interruption from people, centrality to the catchment areas to enable easy access by all interested women and girls.

- The community identified an improvised protection desk and a church, as facilities of choice amongst the available options.
- Formal meetings were held to orient women on activities of the mobile women and Girls safe spaces. Topics of interest were shared and women group leaders were elected per village.
- Counselling sessions were started in Mukunyu village and information sharing undertaken by experts e.g. reproductive health by the health partner and parenting by experienced mothers etc.

RESULTS

- Through the group counselling sessions, women gained confidence in themselves and their level of interactions improved within the group and in other community meetings.
- 80% of the women reported being more peaceful considering that they were sharing their challenges with fellow women with the support of trained case workers and counsellors
- 57 Women and girls accessed GBV information and became strong referral points for GBV incidences.
- Women started engaging in small income generation following the skills sessions that were part of Psychosocial support.
- Some women became part of the community activists, creating awareness on GBV in the communities and increasing access to GBV referrals.
- Three (3) women campaigned and took up leadership positions in their blocks. Each of them explained the roles they played in counselling enabled them to build confidence in leadership just as the male counter parts.

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

Considering that Kyangwali settlement is still receiving new arrivals, there is a plan to set up similar services in the village of Malembo which does not have a women center currently even, considering that the need for services has been expressed by the women and girls in the area.

6.EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH FOOTBALL IN ADJUMANI CAMP

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Over the past years, women/girls' participation in football was seen as a male dominant role in many African cultures. Some traditions within forcibly displaced persons still prohibit girls/women from taking active part in such engagements considered solely for boys. This mindset and beliefs do not only prevent girls from fulfilling their career dreams through opportunities linked to football, but it equally hinders women and girls from realizing their full potential and achieving gender equality in sports.

UNHCR realized the participation of girls and women in football was low in Adjumani. This was also reported by girls and women during peaceful co-existence dialogues, women and girls center meetings among others. Key barriers reported by girls and women were attributed to traditional norms and beliefs which regard football as a sport for only men.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

- UNHCR and partners conducted community awareness sessions on women and girl's participation in football. The sessions emphasized the importance of building their skills in the sport, which could be an income stream to their families, while enhancing peaceful co-existence.
- UNHCR and partners provided counselling to about 50 girls and women who had shown interest in football to further encourage them to participate actively in football.
- The women and girls were enrolled for trainings among male players and were continuously coached.
- UNHCR and Japan International cooperation Agency offered logistical support for the teams to participate in external events like the Tokyo International Conference of African Development (TICAD) cup tournament held in Jinja (2024).

OUTCOMES

- The young women and girls received trainings and mentorships from male football coaches supported by UNHCR and partners, which built their skills.
- The women and girls later formed their own football clubs namely, Pagirinya Young Ladies and Agojo Star Girls' Sports Clubs.



Agojo Star Girls' Sports Club team members during a football gala in Jinja @ UNHCR/Joel Obeta

- The two football clubs embarked on playing football games on international events and competing with male teams.
- The clubs continued to inspire girls/women to dream big and strive to be impactful members of the society through sports clinics aimed at identifying hidden talents within the refugee and host community.
- They proved remarkable and role model clubs with significant progress in fostering peaceful coexistence and breaking the bias on gender discrimination through girls'/women football.
- Football earned one girl a scholarship at Advanced level certificate Education which inspired ladies and the community to encourage more women and girls to join sports.
- The Spain mission (EcA) visited the clubs and expressed interest to fund sport activities including hiring qualified trainers to continue equipping the ladies with more skills in football to further build their talents.

Galea Brenda, a South Sudanese young lady born on 16th August 2004, testified how football skills earned her a 2-year scholarship offer in Biyaya Secondary School Adjumani District, for her Advanced Level Education (S.5-S.6) from 2024-2025. With 4 years' experience playing for Pagirinya Girls Sports Club, Brenda serves as the team captain, something that earned her special recognition from stakeholders. She attributes her success to passion for football, commitment, willingness to learn and support from her family despite the prejudices against female football players in her community.

Just like any other talented female, Brenda's story continues to inspire young girls in Adjumani settlement because of the milestone she has achieved through football. Her aspiration is to become a female sports ambassador for the young forcibly displaced girls and women, "I encourage other girls to engage in football so that they can get such opportunities as mine. They should also work hard in school and focus on completing their education. I also request partners to support us so that we attract more girls to participate in football."

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

The clubs plan to build a wide range of impactful activities, including visits to schools to encourage fellow young girls to engage in sports and overcome challenges that often lead to school dropouts.

RWANDA COUNTRY OPERATION

1. ITETERO DAY CARE: EMPOWERING REFUGEE MOTHERS THROUGH COMMUNITY-LED CHILDCARE IN MAHAMA II CAMP

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Rwanda's progressive refugee policies that grant refugees the right to work and move freely, have allowed many to build livelihoods. Some NGOs have enabled creation of livelihood opportunities for women and supported them with small grants to start businesses. However, working refugee mothers face a unique set of challenges that stem from their dual roles as mothers and workers. Refugee camps in Rwanda have limited livelihood opportunities, and no childcare options for children under the age of 3, forcing mothers to often have to choose to tend to their work, or tend to their children. The absence of affordable childcare services in refugee camps not only hinders the mothers' ability to fully engage in economic activities but also poses risks to the well-being and development of their children. In response to these challenges faced by people in humanitarian crises settings; innovative solutions became essential to empower refugee mothers, enhance their economic independence, and ensure the holistic development of children.

Kumwe Hub (part of Save the Children) conducted research to learn about the motherhood income gap. Refugee mothers expressed that when they have to bring their young children to work with them, they face the challenges of delays, distractions, and destruction of their products. Many reported struggling to find childcare options for their children under the age of 3 years. 40% of the mothers expressed that they had to often leave their children in unsafe environments or in the care of older siblings, which negatively impacted their children's development. Kumwe Hub also learned that mothers were earning 78% less in revenues from their businesses, compared to their male competitors. Kumwe Hub identified childcare as a gap in the Mahama refugee camp based on this. The issue was brought up in almost all locations on multiple occasions including community meetings and livelihood consultations.

Furthermore, the need for childcare in Mahama refugee camp was identified through community engagement sessions (using a Human centered approach) with direct consultations with refugee entrepreneurial mothers. Mothers identified that childcare was available for children in the camp who were above the age of 3, but none was available for children below this age. A human-centered design thinking approach was conducted to first learn about the mothers' pain points when it came to navigating the dual role of being a mother to a young child, and a businesswoman. A participatory design session was then conducted in which the refugee mothers themselves designed the childcare solution for their community.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

Recognizing the childcare challenges faced by entrepreneurial mothers in Mahama Camp, Save the Children, in partnership with UNHCR, established Itetero Daycare under the Kumwe Hub Program in 2022. The daycare center, located at Mahama II Camp, was designed to enable refugee mothers to engage in income-generating activities while ensuring their children receive proper care.

UNHCR and Kumwe Hub program supported by Save the Children international took the following Approach:

1. Understanding the Problem

- A focus group discussion was conducted with refugee mothers running businesses to identify their key childcare challenges.
- The study revealed that a lack of safe and affordable daycare limited women's ability to fully engage in economic activities.

2. Co-Designing a Community-Based Solution

- Through a participatory design session, refugee mothers actively contributed to shaping a for-profit childcare model that would be owned and operated by the community.
- The model ensured sustainability while addressing the unique childcare needs of working mothers. Thus, it also serves as an exit strategy for partners and donors.

3. Infrastructure Development: Securing and Renovating a Facility

- As the government of Rwanda was involved from the beginning of the design process, the Ministry In charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) allocated a building within Mahama II Camp for use as a daycare center.
- The structure underwent rehabilitation to create a safe and child-friendly environment supported by Kumwe Hub.

4. Staff Recruitment & Capacity Development

- Nine refugee volunteers (who were not mothers themselves) were recruited as daycare staff. They received comprehensive training from Save the Children on; Early Childhood Development, Health and Nutrition, Child Safeguarding and Business Development Services (through Kumwe Hub)

5. Provision of Resources for Daycare Operations

- An initial grant was allocated to purchase essential materials, including Kitchen equipment for food preparation, educational and play materials for child development and Hygiene and sanitation supplies to maintain health and safety standards. It is important to note that currently, these supplies are purchased using the contribution from mothers.

6. Community Awareness & Enrollment of Beneficiaries

- The daycare was marketed to refugee mothers with children aged 6 months to 3 years who were engaged in business activities.
- All enrolled mothers had previously received business training from Inkomoko (NGO partner supporting local entrepreneurship) and were running micro-businesses in Mahama Camp.

7. Establishment of a Parent and Community Association

- A Parent and Community Association (PCA) was formed to ensure community ownership and decision-making.
- Members, including parents, daycare staff, and community leaders, met monthly to oversee the daycare's operations and strategic direction.

8. Measuring Impact & Ensuring Quality Services

- Regular impact assessments were conducted to evaluate; Children's health, nutrition, and well-being, Mothers' economic empowerment and business productivity and Feedback from mothers and caregivers was integrated into ongoing improvements.

9. Transitioning to Community Ownership & Financial Sustainability

- Kumwe Hub initially subsidized operational costs for the first 16 months while gradually transitioning the daycare to full community ownership.
- From the 9th month onward, mothers contributed an increasing percentage of daycare fees each month, starting at 10% until reaching 100% self-financing.
- Parents collectively agreed on a monthly fee of RWF 25,000 per child, ensuring sustainability without external funding. Currently, 25 children are enrolled, and fees support staff salaries and daycare operations. The only remaining dependency is rental costs for the facility.

10. Graduation & Long-Term Sustainability

- In August 2024, Kumwe Hub celebrated the graduation of 65 children who had benefited from Itetero Daycare.
- The daycare's success has enhanced refugee mothers' economic opportunities, allowing them to focus on their businesses while knowing their children are Cared for by trained volunteers, fed nutritious meals and provided with early learning opportunities

Save the Children and UNHCR continues to support the daycare in safeguarding, staff training, and technical assistance, ensuring its long-term impacts.

OUTCOMES

- The establishment of Itetero Daycare has significantly reduced barriers for refugee women engaged in income-generating activities. Mothers have indicated that having access to reliable childcare has enabled them to work efficiently and grow their businesses without the constant worry of balancing work and childcare.
- The daycare operates on a sustainable business model, where working mothers contribute fees that fully cover operational costs, ensuring long-term self-sufficiency and community ownership of the initiative.

- Since its inception in June 2022, 144 children have graduated from the daycare's Early Childhood Development (ECD) program, with 47% of graduates being girls.
- The daycare has maintained an 87% graduation rate, with most dropouts attributed to family repatriation or asylum opportunities.
- In addition to supporting children's development, the initiative has also created nine new jobs within the refugee community, with 50% of positions held by women.
- Daycare's impact on mothers' businesses has been remarkable. On average, participating mothers have experienced a 108% increase in weekly income and a 136% increase in weekly savings. With access to childcare, mothers are now able to dedicate an additional four hours per day to their businesses, leading to higher productivity and expansion. This has also resulted in the creation of 0.5 additional jobs per mother, further strengthening the local economy.
- Beyond financial gains, daycare has enhanced skill development among its staff. All caregivers have received training in Early Childhood Development, health, nutrition, safeguarding, education, and business development. This has improved the overall quality of care and learning outcomes for children. Parents have also reported high satisfaction with the daycare services, citing improvements in their children's health, nutrition, and protection, as well as increased confidence in their own business ventures.
- The daycare has also fostered greater male engagement in childcare responsibilities, with 50% of staff being men. Fathers are increasingly involved in caregiving roles, including picking up children from daycare, reflecting a shift towards more equitable parental responsibilities.
- Furthermore, the community-led governance model ensures that mothers of enrolled children make strategic decisions for daycare through monthly meetings, reinforcing local ownership and sustainability.
- Ultimately, Itetero Daycare has not only provided a safe and nurturing environment for young children but has also strengthened the economic independence of refugee mothers, enhanced community cohesion, and created a replicable model for sustainable, community-run childcare.



The Itetero Daycare center @Kumwe hub

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

- Given the success and positive effects that *Itetero* demonstrated, the project is now being expanded to Mahama I camp due to the demand from communities living in Mahama I. Further, UNHCR is looking into the replication in different camps and urban locations.
- UNHCR is exploring a similar concept in Kigali and Kiziba camps to be implemented by women-RLOs.
- Given the success of the daycare initiative in Mahama refugee camp, Kumwe Hub plans to scale the model to all Rwandan refugee camps and expand to 6 new countries between 2026-2028. Kumwe Hub is seeking funding for this project. The core features for replication include using a participatory design to help mothers design a childcare solution that they are willing to invest in.

2.PROMOTING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN DISPLACEMENT SETTINGS: A FOCUS ON MAHAMA AND KIGEME CAMPS

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Refugee women faced significant barriers to economic empowerment, despite encouragement to pursue entrepreneurship. A lack of stable income-generating opportunities left many financially dependent, struggling to support their families. The absence of job opportunities meant that basic needs often went unmet, increasing their vulnerability. Additionally, many refugee women lacked the necessary technical and business skills to engage in artisan work or other trades, limiting their ability to produce high-quality, competitive products. Even those with existing skills faced difficulties accessing markets due to logistical barriers, lack of connections, and limited understanding of pricing and quality standards required for regional and international trade. In the past, many refugee women engaged in training to make artisan products as therapeutic

activities, rather than a comprehensive livelihood opportunity. Beyond market access, financial exclusion further restricted women's ability to grow their businesses. Many lacked access to savings, credit, or financial services, making it impossible to invest in materials or scale up their work beyond subsistence-level activities. Furthermore, the absence of organized support networks such as cooperatives left the women without spaces to collaborate, share knowledge, or advocate for better economic opportunities. Recognizing these critical gaps, UNHCR and MINEMA collaborated with partners like Indego Africa to introduce targeted interventions aimed at equipping female refugees with skills in weaving and entrepreneurship while providing essential market access. These efforts have since enabled refugee women to build sustainable livelihoods and integrate into the global artisan economy.

These challenges faced by female refugees were identified through various channels, ensuring that interventions were informed by direct community needs. Community engagement forums played a key role, providing a space for refugee women to voice their struggles regarding employment, skills development, and market access. In addition, refugee coordination meetings facilitated discussions between UNHCR, government agencies, and implementing partners, allowing for a broader understanding of the economic barriers affecting displaced women. These platforms helped highlight the systemic issues limiting refugee entrepreneurship and self-reliance. Further validation of these challenges came from needs assessments, baseline studies, and direct observations conducted by UNHCR and its partners. These assessments provided data-driven insights into the lack of training, financial exclusion, and gaps in market access. Additionally, UNHCR's livelihood strategies and reports helped document recurring challenges, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions. Through this multi-layered approach, UNHCR and its partners were able to design and implement solutions that directly address the economic constraints faced by refugee women, ultimately fostering long-term resilience and self-sufficiency.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

To support female refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency, UNHCR and its partners, including Indego Africa, developed a structured approach to integrate them into the global artisan economy. Each party's commitment is formalized through an annual Letter of Understanding (LOU) to ensure sustained collaboration. The intervention followed a systematic process, outlined in the steps below:

1. Needs Assessment & Baseline Survey

- Comprehensive assessments to identify the challenges, skill levels, and economic needs of female refugees in the target communities.
- Mapping existing skills and gaps to determine the necessary interventions for their successful participation in the artisan market.

2. Program Design

- Development of a structured training curriculum tailored to artisan skills, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy.
- Design of support mechanisms, including mentorship and cooperative development, to create a holistic empowerment model.

3. Skills Development & Training

- Hands-on training in artisan crafts such as basket weaving and dyeing to enhance technical expertise.
- Workshops on quality control, design innovation, and global market trends to increase product competitiveness.
- Entrepreneurship training, including financial literacy, savings management, cooperative leadership, pricing strategies, and marketing.

4. Formation of Cooperatives & Business Support

- Formation of artisan cooperatives to encourage collaboration, increase production capacity, and improve bargaining power.
- Assist cooperatives with legal registration, enabling them to access grants, loans, and government support programs.

5. Access to Markets & Economic Empowerment

- Connect refugee artisans with local and international buyers to create sustainable market opportunities.
- Establish partnerships with global brands, online marketplaces, and fair-trade organizations to increase visibility and sales.
- Organize trade fairs, exhibitions, and digital sales platforms to showcase their products and expand their reach.

6. Financial Inclusion & Microfinance Support

- Partner with financial institutions to facilitate access to savings accounts and micro-loans for refugee women.
- Introduction of savings initiatives like the "IGICERI Program," providing micro-loans to help artisans invest in raw materials, scale production, or launch their own businesses.

7. Continuous Monitoring & Capacity Building

- Regular follow-ups, including an Annual Social Impact Assessment, to measure program effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.
- Provision of refresher and advanced training to enhance artisans' skills and ensure continued growth.
- Foster mentorship and leadership development by encouraging successful artisans to train and inspire new participants.

OUTCOME/RESULTS

- **The shift from financial dependence to self-sufficiency:** Through vocational training and entrepreneurship education, these women have gained technical expertise in artisan crafts, financial literacy, and business management. As a result, they now produce high-quality baskets and bags that are sold both locally and internationally, securing long-term economic stability for themselves and their families. Their success has not only improved

- household incomes but has also contributed to Rwanda's balance of trade through the export of handcrafted goods.
- **The program has fostered a culture of self-reliance and cooperative management:** Indego Africa has supported the artisans in forming, registering, and managing five cooperatives, ensuring their sustainability through structured financial practices, such as opening bank accounts, saving for the future, and reinvesting in their businesses. The establishment of cooperatives like Akeza, TURASHOBOYE, Umuco, Igisubizo, and Hope has created a strong support network where women collaborate, share knowledge, and mentor new artisans.
- **347 female refugees have been trained and empowered** to operate their own businesses, demonstrating the long-term impact of the intervention on economic resilience and social inclusion in refugee communities.

Quotes from Targeted Community Women

"Before partnering with indego Africa, we relied entirely on UNHCR for support. now, we earn our own money, can access loans, and live happier, more fulfilled lives. we hope these positive changes continue." - (Akeza cooperative)

"We are confident and happy women. Before the interventions, our living conditions were extremely difficult, and our families' futures felt uncertain. today, we are earning money, living with dignity, and feeling hopeful for what is ahead."- (Turashoboye cooperative)

"..... i couldn't even afford basic necessities like skincare products. I depended entirely on my family. Now, i am financially independent, and my community respects me because they know i work with indego." - (umuco cooperative)

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

The Economic Inclusion for Refugees program has led to several unexpected yet impactful outcomes:

- **Expansion Beyond Mahama Camp:** Originally designed for Burundian refugees in Mahama Camp, the program later expanded to Kigeme Camp, benefiting Congolese refugees as well. This demonstrates its adaptability and scalability.
- **Greater Financial Independence:** Beyond earning income, artisans have shown strong financial literacy, successfully managing bank accounts, participating in savings groups, and distributing dividends among cooperative members. Some have even launched their own businesses outside the cooperative.
- **Stronger Local Artisan Networks:** The program has encouraged collaboration between refugee artisans and local Rwandan artisans, fostering economic and social inclusion beyond what was initially expected.
- **Market Expansion Beyond Indego Africa:** Some cooperatives, such as Akeza and Umuco, have started securing independent clients outside of Indego Africa. For example, they established partnerships with Irebe Decoration Ltd in Kigali and have begun selling products in Kenya.
- **Social Empowerment & Leadership Development:** Many artisans have taken on leadership roles within their cooperatives and communities. Women who previously had no experience in management are now handling finances, training new members, and leading cooperative operations.
- **Unexpected Artisan Innovations:** Artisans have demonstrated remarkable creativity and adaptability, introduced new product designs and experimented with weaving techniques beyond what was initially taught. This has helped diversify product offerings and attract a wider customer base.
- **Improved Gender Dynamics:** The program has shifted traditional gender roles in some families, as women who were once financially dependent on their spouses are now actively contributing to household income.
- **Enhanced Community Resilience:** Beyond financial gains, the cooperative model has strengthened social ties, creating a mutual support system among members. Artisans assist each other during personal and financial hardships, fostering a resilient and self-reliant community within the refugee camps.

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

In addition to expanding within Rwanda, there are plans to establish a partnership with a group of 50 repatriated artisans in Burundi. This group is based in Kirundo, Mugendo Cell – Ntega, and previously worked with Indego Africa at Mahama and has now formed a cooperative in Burundi. This partnership will support their efforts and continued economic empowerment in their home country Burundi.

3. REFUGEE WOMAN ENHANCING DIGITAL ACCESS IN MAHAMA REFUGEE CAMP

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

In Rwanda, refugees are not connected to the internet due to several barriers including: High cost of digital devices (smartphones), high cost of mobile data, limited mobile charging locations, poor-quality and limited access to Wi-Fi, limited access to public/shared digital devices and low digital literacy. Kumwe Hub conducted a needs assessment within the Mahama refugee camp community to learn about the barriers that were hindering refugees from connecting to the internet. This study was completed in January 2023 with support from MINEMA (the Government of Rwanda).

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

Design session was conducted with refugee parents, youth and children to respond to the barriers that refugees face when connecting to the internet. Solutions that were designed in the session were implemented, including setting up of a for-profit internet cafe and a Refugee-led digital training business.

Processes towards establishing internet cafe:

- **Call for Applications:** Kumwe Hub launched a call for applications for Community Network Design Training.
- **Training Implementation:** Kumwe Hub hired Resilient Global Technologies to conduct a 30-day training for 30 refugees to develop their skills in community network design.
- **Business Competition:** Trainees were invited to apply for ownership of an internet café by submitting a business plan, budget, and marketing strategy that focused on including refugees and refugee children online.
- **Selection of Owner:** After reviewing applications, Betty (a mother of 3 who is a refugee from DR Congo living in Mahama) was selected as the owner of the internet café. Betty was selected due to her business background within the digital economy, selling digital devices within the refugee camp. Furthermore, she had been trained in business development by the camp partner, Inkomoko, and had successfully paid back multiple loans. The selection panel also found Betty's reputation appealing because she integrated women and children into her marketing plans for promoting internet access to refugees.



Section of refugee youth attending training session in mahama camp @kumwe hub

- **Café Design:** Kumwe Hub collaborated with Betty to design the internet café building, ensuring it aligned with her vision and operational needs.
- **Equipment Selection:** Betty created an equipment list tailored to the café's requirements.
- **Funding Agreement:** Kumwe Hub covered 70% of material costs, Betty financed 30% of the costs from her other investments in the camp. In addition, Kumwe Hub issued a grant to support the purchase of materials.
- **Procurement & Installation:** Betty purchased, ordered, and oversaw shipping and installation of all materials, including a 5G Starlink for Business modem.
- **Launch & Operations:** In November 2024, Betty successfully launched the internet café and began generating profits immediately, using customer revenue to sustain operational costs. The internet cafe charges clients 300 RWF to use the internet on a laptop for 1 hour.



Youth accessing services in the Mahama digital center internet café run by Betty @Kumwe hub

OUTCOME/RESULTS

- Mahama Digital center has employed 13 refugees
- In the first month of operation, the digital center had 344 visitors of which 49% were female users
- In the first month, the center made a profit of 170 USD, while in the third month of operation, it made a profit of 400 USD.

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

Given the success of this Digital Centre in Mahama refugee camp, Kumwe Hub plans to scale the model to all Rwandan refugee camps between 2026-2028. Kumwe Hub is seeking funding for this project, that will seek to enhance women leadership and strengthening of their digital skills.

SOMALIA COUNTRY OPERATION

GENDER-INCLUSIVE MARKET TO PROMOTE LIVELIHOODS IN DOLLOW CAMP

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Prior to UNHCR and its partners' intervention, IDPs and returnees in Somalia faced significant economic challenges, with limited access to sustainable income-generating opportunities. Women and girls, including survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), were particularly affected due to social and economic exclusion. The absence of structured economic infrastructure restricted access to trading spaces, further marginalizing women from financial independence. Economic dependency on humanitarian aid, combined with limited access to financial services, exacerbated vulnerabilities and exposure to exploitation. These challenges highlighted the urgent

need for structured economic empowerment interventions that would provide displaced populations particularly women with opportunities to achieve self-reliance and financial stability.

The issues were identified through participatory assessments, protection monitoring, interagency coordination forums, and reports from GBVIMS+. Community engagement forums and direct consultations with affected populations further validated the urgent need for structured protection and livelihood interventions.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

To support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, a multi-sectoral approach was adopted, integrating economic empowerment, financial inclusion, and protection services to ensure sustainable market access for displaced and vulnerable populations.

- The intervention began with a needs assessment and stakeholder engagement, where UNHCR conducted assessments in IDP settlements, returnee communities, and host populations to identify key livelihood gaps.
- Women's groups and community representatives were engaged to map out economic barriers, and local authorities collaborated to secure land and approvals for market infrastructure development.
- Following the assessment, UNHCR and its partners in collaboration with community members constructed the vegetable market at *KAHAREY IDP Camp in Dollow* to support mainly women IDPs and host community traders.
- Gender-sensitive planning was ensured, prioritizing women entrepreneurs and GBV survivors. Sanitation and safety measures were integrated to create an inclusive trading environment, while equitable stall allocation ensured fair access for all groups, particularly displaced women.
- A formal handover ceremony for the vegetable market was conducted on 14th January 2025, attended by representatives from local authorities, the UNHCR field team, and market vendors.
- A community vendor association, composed of IDPs, returnees, and host community members, was established to oversee market operations. A significant representation of women in the association was observed to ensure that their needs and challenges were continually addressed.
- A governance framework for vendor cooperatives was developed to ensure equitable market management.

OUTCOMES

- The handover ceremony took place on 14th January 2025 and was attended by women and men in the community, representatives from the local authorities, and the UNHCR field team. This market provides a valuable opportunity for mostly Female IDPs to engage in trading and selling vegetables, promoting self-reliance, and offering a steady source of income. Such economic activities enable families to meet their basic needs while reducing reliance on humanitarian aid.



Officials address women during the hand-over ceremony of the vegetable market at the Kaharey IDP Camp in Dollow @UNHCR

- In addition to its economic benefits, the market serves as a community hub where displaced populations and host communities can come together to trade and interact. This shared space fosters peaceful coexistence and strengthens social connections within the community.
- Women and girls who participated in livelihood programs achieved financial independence, reducing their reliance on negative coping strategies. Reception services ensured that returnees and new arrivals received immediate and structured support, reducing exposure to further risks.
- Women entrepreneurs have assumed decision-making roles within the market vendor association, demonstrating emerging leadership capacities, further supporting gender equality.

PLANS FOR REPLICATION

Building on the success of the intervention, plans are in place to expand similar models to other locations in Somalia where displaced and host communities face comparable economic challenges. Strengthening governance structures for vendor cooperatives is a key focus to ensure equitable market access and management to both men and women of the IDP and vulnerable host communities.

SOUTH SUDAN COUNTRY OPERATION

ADVANCING GENDER INCLUSIVE CASH ASSISTANCE: THE ROLE OF SOUTH SUDAN WOMEN AS PRIMARY RECIPIENTS

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Access to Cash Based Interventions (CBI) for women led households and decisions on cash expenditures were a huge challenge to women amongst UNHCR targeted populations in Juba. Restrictive gender norms including women participation in community dialogues and financial control by Men hindered meaningful engagement of women in selection criteria determination and decision making on how to use the funds within the households. Most of them lacked identification documents, had low financial knowledge and poor access to mobile money or banking services, which rendered it impossible for women to be enrolled as direct recipients. Logistical barriers, such as insecurity, mobility limitations, and distances to distribution centers, compounded these challenges. Consequently, women's engagement in cash support was low, reinforcing gender inequalities and limiting their contribution to financial decisions in their households, and thus justifying a gender-transformative approach to cash-based programs.

PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

Low female participation in cash assistance programs in South Sudan was A challenge identified through multiple avenues including formal assessments undertaken in collaboration with partners, community dialogues and post-distribution monitoring (PDM) processes. The concerns were further voiced in interagency coordination forums, where stakeholders working on Cash-Based Interventions (CBIs) and protection shared findings from various assessments, reinforcing the urgent need for a gender-responsive approach.

To address these barriers, UNHCR and its partners implemented a comprehensive communication strategy that conveyed information in simple and accessible language, mindful of the cultural and ethnic diversity among displaced populations. This approach included visual aids such as posters and alternative multimedia channels to ensure broader reach.

Recognizing the importance of community buy-in, local leaders were actively involved in designing and implementing the communication strategy to minimize resistance. Additionally, UNHCR took steps to ensure that all stakeholders—including men, women, and local authorities—understood the importance of increasing female participation in cash as assistance, emphasizing its positive impact on household well-being and resilience. To further enhance the

program, feedback and response mechanisms were put in place, enabling community members to report challenges in a safe and confidential manner.

Collectively, these efforts led to a more inclusive and effective cash assistance initiative, allowing women to participate safely and meaningfully in financial decision-making within their households

RESULTS

- Since UNHCR and its partners took steps to increase female participation as recipients of cash assistance, the effect on displaced communities in South Sudan has been significant. Women have reported feeling more empowered, with greater involvement in household financial decisions and improved control over resources. Many have expressed that direct access to cash assistance has enhanced their ability to meet their families' needs, including purchasing food, school supplies, and medical care. Community members have also noted a shift in gender dynamics, with more acceptance levels amongst men regarding women handling financial matters.



Women Receiving cash assistance during a cash distribution exercise @UNHCR

- Data collected by UNHCR, and partners show a marked increase in women registered as primary cash recipients, alongside higher household food security scores and improved access to basic services. 2024 PDM has also indicated a reduction in tensions within families, as men and women increasingly make financial decisions together.
- Qualitative feedback from focus group discussions and traders survey meetings has highlighted positive shifts in the number of females who are accessing the markets to purchase goods for their families.

- The UNHCR EHAGL region 2024 Gender Equality update indicates a Cash assistance gender parity of 1.62 in South Sudan, depicting more access to cash assistance by females compared to Males.



A woman returnee is her coffee shop, established after cash assistance @UNHCR

PLANS FOR REPLICATION OR SCALING UP

- UNHCR and partners are working to refine their communication strategy, further engaging community leaders to reinforce acceptance.
- Efforts are underway to expand financial literacy training, ensuring that women can manage resources effectively and make informed financial choices.
- Based on lessons learned, similar interventions are being considered in other displacement settings within South Sudan and beyond, ensuring that women's inclusion in cash assistance programs continues to grow and contribute to stronger, more resilient communities.



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