



NORTHERN UGANDA EARLY RECOVERY PROJECT (NUERP)

A UNTFHS funded project implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Food Programme (WFP)

July 2009 – July 2012

Beneficiary Stories

Background

The decades-long Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in northern Uganda claimed hundreds of lives, displaced thousands of people from their ancestral homes, and disrupted the livelihoods of affected communities. Following the departure of the LRA from Uganda, many families returned home only to face additional challenges including conflicts over land, the lack of infrastructure and basic services, and few employment prospects.

The Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project (NUERP), a joint UN programme implemented by the UNDP, WHO and WFP, and funded by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, aimed to support the rapid and self-sustainable recovery of the conflict-affected returning population and their communities through integrated service delivery and community-based recovery in four districts in the Lango Sub-region. The project focused on improving incomes, agricultural and non-agricultural production capacity, and access to credit; enhancing health and nutritional status; increasing access to safe water and sanitation facilities; and, improving community capacity for peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Dennis Obote, Advocating for peace in war ravaged communities

Dennis Obote may not have gone to law school, but he considers himself a peace advocate. In one year's time, Dennis has supervised the successful resolution of more than 20 disputes relating to domestic violence and land contestations, among others, in his community of Arwotngo, Okwang Sub County, Otuke district, northern Uganda.



Dennis Obote (left) sharing his peace building and conflict management experiences with NUERP Peace Facilitator, Acak Paul, at his home, Bar Lwala village, Arwotngo parish Okwang sub-county, during a monitoring visit in December 2011.

He is one of several young people who have been trained in peace building and conflict resolution by World Vision and UNDP under the NUERP. Since his training, Dennis has been reaching out to members of his community and other surrounding areas, assisting the work to spread information on how to resolve conflicts amicably, achieve reconciliation and live in peace and harmony. Dennis says the training he has received has elevated him in the eyes of the community and equipped him with the skills for positive change.

“I was trained in peace building and conflict resolution. Therefore, I can now control my temper, cherish confidence to speak about what affects and destroys peace, and offer counselling and advice to parties in conflict and survivors. I am now a careful listener, and able to diagnose issues”, says Dennis.

So far, the toughest dispute that he has handled concerned an abandoned woman with children searching for her husband, a former combatant. Dennis managed to track down the soldier and successfully reunite the family. *“Any unskilful person would not want to risk the issues of a soldier, but I thank God I was able to do it”*, recounts Dennis.

In another case, he was asked to settle a land dispute between two members of the same clan. The matter had initially been reported to the police who in turn referred the matter to Dennis. Through the clan leaders and other stakeholders, Dennis summoned a dialogue meeting that successfully brokered an agreement between the two individuals and resolved the dispute.

Today, Denis is a member of the sub-county court committee in recognition of his negotiation skills and service to the community. He admits being challenged by the fact that many people in the community look to him as an agent of change. Unlike the formal legal system, Dennis does not charge any fees, thus increasing the number of cases that are reported to him. Sometimes he refers his clients to fellow youth and women peace rings and other stakeholders. For others, he offers technical advice. Overall, there is tremendous change in the community where Dennis is working thanks to the NUERP peace building intervention. Peace building and conflict resolution are considered essential to the well-being and prosperity of the communities in northern Uganda and have been incorporated into social and economic initiatives such as the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) as well as farmer group activities.

Morris Ojok, Improving farmers’ incomes through access to credit

Morris Ojok is a rural small-scale farmer with the ambition to educate and to help transform the lives of other farmers in his community. In July 2011, Morris and 29 other members formed *Bed Iworo*, a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), aiming to mobilize savings to provide affordable loans to members. By December 2011, the group had accumulated Shs. 2,150,000.



Morris Ojok (in blue shirt) weighing rice before he takes it to the market. From his savings and additional borrowing from the VSLA, Morris buys produce, especially rice from fellow farmers. Adwari Otuke district on 20 December 2011.

From his savings and additional loans from the VSLA, Morris produces and buys rice from fellow farmers, transporting it to Lira for hulling. In December, he borrowed Shs. 500,000 from the VSLA, bought and sold rice, and earned a net profit of Shs. 200,000. He says the business is lucrative, though seasonal. Five other group members have joined the same business in different locations and they are experiencing the same prosperity.

In order to increase production, Morris is planning to buy oxen to expand his acreage, a step towards agriculture commercialization. He has bought a goat for one of his daughters in order to

provide for her school tuition. He was also able to purchase a mattress for his home. He is determined to transform the lives of his family and the entire community and he encourages other members of the community to venture into similar businesses now that they have access to loans at affordable rates.

Mary Akello, Rebuilding livelihoods and communities through women's leadership

Mary Akello is a resident of Abulubulu village, Onywako parish, Barr sub-county, Lira district in Northern Uganda. She is 38 years old and cares for five young children, all of whom are still in school. Her village was ravaged by the LRA rebellion, forcing villagers to abandon it and seek refuge in other villages and makeshift IDP camps. Widowed during the war, Mary returned to her ancestral land only to find that basic services such as water, healthcare and education facilities were lacking. As a woman, Mary also faced the challenge of gaining access to land in order to make a living.

Nevertheless, the hope for Mary and other villagers in her community was restored when the NEURP initiative was established to assist the region in recovering from the war. In Onywako parish, the project supports 187 households by supplying them with high yielding seed and a variety of crops, including groundnuts, maize, beans, cassava and soybean. As a result, Mary and other farmers in her village have improved their yields and are now earning significantly higher incomes from supplying fresh products to local traders.

"I used to work in peoples' gardens so that I could raise some money to buy seeds and support my family and this delayed timely land opening and planting on my side. With the support I received from UNDP through World Vision, I was able to plant in time during the first rains and am happy with the harvests I got. I received 7 kgs of quick maturing and high yielding Serenut IV groundnut seeds, planted on a half-acre of land and harvested 120 kgs. The project equipped me and 'Note en Teko' [Unity is strength] group members with appropriate skills and knowledge in improved farming technologies with a cassava demo garden established, and provided us with tools and oxen to increase the land area under production," says Mary.



Mary Akello showing the World Vision team her groundnut yields. She harvested 120kgs up from 7kgs; she also planted soy bean in the second season.

Since joining the project, she has stopped providing casual work at other people's farms and has been able to concentrate on her land to support her household, which gives her family joy and a sense of dignity.

The NUERP also facilitated the establishment of four Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), including one in Abulubulu village, to enable community members to save and make investments. In addition, it has promoted gender equality and championed equal opportunities for women. Mary serves as the chairperson of the 'Note en Teko' VSLA group, which consists of 30 members, mostly vulnerable women. Within two months, the group had accumulated savings of Shs.740, 000 (equivalent to 300 US\$) which the members can borrow at low interest rates. The group has been very important in building capacities and unity among women in Abulubulu village, according to Mary.

"With the help of the VSLA group, poor women in Abulubulu village are now being seen by others as people who have value. I borrowed Shs.80, 000 (equivalent to US \$ 32) from the VSLA which I topped up to send my eldest son back to vocational school this term," adds Mary. She explains that the women are involved in the management of the Association and have benefitted from UNDP's and World Vision's technical guidance, which has helped their group to thrive.

The project's strategy to integrate livelihoods recovery with peace building and reconciliation initiatives has also contributed to positive transformation of the entire community. Beyond her income generating activities, Mary is also the chairperson of Barr 'peace ring'. The peace ring consists of 15 women and 15 young people trained in peace and reconciliation who work as volunteers to mediate

and solve disputes in their communities concerning land, domestic violence and child neglect. Mary reveals that the peace ring has been able to save many villagers the hurdle of having their cases handled by the local council authorities or the police who usually charge fees, only referring those cases that might be above their jurisdiction to handle.

Although great milestones have been achieved through the NUERP, Mary and other beneficiaries would like to see a continuation of the project in order to consolidate the benefits realized so far and to ensure more sustainable livelihoods for the community.

This document is based on beneficiary stories produced by UNDP Uganda.