

# APT Action on Poverty

## Improved livelihoods and climate resilience for refugees in Northern Uganda

### Final Report – January 2026

#### Background

The project was carried out in Palabek Refugee Settlement and surrounding host communities in Lamwo County, Uganda between September 2023 and December 2025. It was managed in partnership between APT Action on Poverty and VEDCO (Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns) a Ugandan registered NGO and long-term partner of APT.

Originally the project aimed to support 1,200 farmers (70% women, 70% refugees, 5% people with disabilities) to set up sustainable and climate-resilient vegetable farming businesses. With increased funding in year 2, the number of farmers groups supported was expanded from 40 to 65, with the project aiming to reach 1950 farmers and to improve the incomes and climate resilience of 9,000 people.

The planned outcomes of the project were:

- Outcome 1: Increased incomes and productivity from sustainable vegetable production.
- Outcome 2: Improved natural resource protection.
- Outcome 3: Greater confidence and self-reliance of refugee and host community households.

#### OUTCOME 1: INCREASED INCOMES AND PRODUCTIVITY FROM SUSTAINABLE VEGETABLE PRODUCTION

##### Summary of project activities Outcome 1

To achieve this outcome, VEDCO established and trained 65 farmers groups in business plan development and enterprise selection, and in climate smart agricultural techniques. In each group a marketing officer was trained and supported to help their group to access markets for the vegetables produced. Linkages were made between the groups and input dealers, traders and other service providers to increase access to agricultural inputs. Two seed producer groups were also formed and trained (one the in the settlement and one in the host community) specifically to replicate vegetable seed for sale in the surrounding community. All groups were trained in post-harvest handling and value addition and inputs (including solar driers and tarpaulins) provided to reduce post-harvest losses. Support was given for the establishment of VSLAs in each farmers group to ensure a strong savings culture and provide capital for individual and group business development.

##### Summary of Achievements: Outcome 1

1823 farmers reported using new skills in agriculture, which is 92% of those trained. In focus group discussions, members of all farmers groups were able to explain the skills they had put into practice in the production of vegetables. Most frequently mentioned was line planting (as opposed to random scattering of seed) allowing for more efficient weeding, watering and leading to higher yields. Farmers also frequently mentioned producing organic pesticide from husks, mulching, using organic fertiliser and planning/setting aside some crop for seed production. The most active diet champions had also reached out to people beyond their groups to pass on information on these improved farming methods. Of the 1823 farmers adopting these techniques, 1659 (91%) were women and 64 (3.5%) were PWD; 1294 (71%) were refugees.

Farmers who had used the new techniques, all reported increased productivity. Increases varied for different crops, for example those producing cow peas reported that using line planting had increased yields by 2-3 times compared to scattering seeds. 55 groups had succeeded in diversifying their production, using profits from the original gardens to grow alternative crops such as tomatoes, onions and eggplant. Post-harvest losses were decreased by training and provision of material support such as tarpaulins and solar driers

All groups received quality foundation seed, with plants producing seed that could be sold on. Overall £95,956 worth of seed was reproduced and sold by farmers groups. The amount of fresh vegetable produced is harder to measure since most was consumed or sold in local markets.

84% (1662) farmers, (1247 women, 415 men, 59 PWD, 1046 refugees) had increased their year round income by at least 50%. This was achieved both through the sale of produce from vegetable farms, and by investment of the

profits in other individual or group business ventures. The delay of rains in the first year of the project led to some disappointing harvests in year 1, but more reliable rains in year 2 led to the majority of farmers increasing their income by considerably more than 50%.

All farmers groups had active VSLAs promoting savings, providing small loans and in some cases managing group businesses. Members were able to borrow both for small business projects and farming inputs, and for basic needs including school fees/medical costs. Total cumulative savings of the VSLAS in year two was Ugx 502,069,900 (£104,560) and loans given out Ugx 405,404,100 (£84,427).

91% of farmers (1791 people - 1361 women, 430 men, 65 PWD, 1,271 refugees) reported improved knowledge of markets and pricing as a result of the project. Marketing officers reported that they had gained and used skills in identifying customers, negotiating and record keeping; they were using these skills to sell vegetables from group plots, identify markets for individual producers and also to develop other group businesses (eg buying and selling maize). Some marketing officers were extremely active, collecting information of when each member's crops would be ready, spreading information as to the quality of the produce and going door to door to find buyers. However, in a small number of groups marketing officers had moved away or become inactive. 62% of farmers reported that they had sold vegetables through marketing representatives while others had sold without support.

### **Case study: Susan Akwero – Marketing officer**

Susan left South Sudan seven years ago – she was alone with her five children and two orphans she adopted. After she was relocated in Palabek Refugee settlement she joined a group mostly made up of widows and children. The group is called 'women are feeding the next generation'.

Susan was chosen to be the group's marketing officer. She says the group chose her because she is a strong business woman and because she likes working with people. Susan was trained in marketing, including how to identify products that will sell well, pricing, quality and customer care. The most useful part of the training for her was record keeping.



Susan now helps the individual members of her group to sell at local markets, informing customers when different crops are ready and inviting them to buy. VEDCO provided the group with a solar drier which allows them to offer different dried vegetables even through the dry season when fresh crops are not produced. The group also have a joint plot - they recently harvested and dried a crop of okra which Susan succeeded in selling for 300,000 UGX (£63). On her advice the group used this money to buy colourful bedsheets which they are embroidering to sell on. She noted that people value these sheets and are bringing them from South Sudan but they are difficult to source in the settlement, therefore she is confident they can make a good profit. The group have bought 20 bedsheets and are intending to sell each for 60,000 UGX (£12.50). Susan says she enjoys her role because she can use her skills to help others.

## **OUTCOME 2: IMPROVED NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION**

### **Summary of project activities Outcome 2**

Under this outcome trainings were designed to help farmers improve soil quality, conserve water/reduce erosion, reduce use of pesticides and take action against deforestation. Farmers groups were taught methods of mulching, creation of organic fertilisers, erosion prevention and production of organic pesticides. Representatives from the 65 farmers' groups were also trained in the production of fuel efficient stoves. 5 stove producer groups were formed by the women trained, and supplied with start up kits (wheelbarrows, knives, moulds etc) to allow them to produce the stoves commercially. The farmers groups were trained on existing by-laws concerning environmental protection, and supported to produce their own environmental action plans as a group. Representative group members were trained in advocacy and supported to represent issues faced by the groups to government and settlement authorities.

## Summary of Achievements Outcome 2

71% of farmers (1399 people - 1,007 women, 392 men, 64 PWD, 1021 refugees) reported using soil and water conservation practices taught by the project. In focus group discussions they mentioned managing high levels of run off/ erosion during the rainy season by digging drainage holes and channels, and planting fruit trees to protect crops. They also described mulching to preserve soil moisture in the dry season, crop rotation and making organic fertiliser from animal and vegetable waste. In general, they felt these actions had contributed to increasing productivity. However, the long dry season was still a challenging time for most with little opportunity to produce crops except in a few low lying areas.

1207 fuel efficient stoves were produced and in use during the life of the project. The stoves proved popular among beneficiaries – they mentioned that they reduce firewood usage by 3 times, that they are cleaner and create less smoke and they are not dangerous for young children. Overall 43% of farmers (859 people - 782 women, 77men, 65 PWD, 670 refugees) said that they had reduced firewood usage over the life of the project, now using 1-1.4 bundles weekly as opposed to 3 bundles at project start. This % is expected to increase as stove producers continue to reach more households.

76% of farmers (1507 people - 1,160 women, 347men, 61 PWD, 1,130 refugees) felt they now had a greater ability to withstand climate shocks and stresses. Farmers groups mentioned the benefit of vegetable gardens in helping to withstand climate shocks –they valued the fact that vegetables were fast growing and could be preserved to be eaten in the dry season. Those with solar driers valued the fact that the vegetables dried quickly and could be sold for higher prices when fresh vegetables were less available.

By project end 1787 people had been reached with messages on environmental by-laws and resource protection principles. All farmers groups were aware of the ban on tree cutting without permission, and the need to replant several seedlings for any tree that was taken down. Some groups had marked with red paint particularly precious trees in their zone that should not be touched. Asked how they were managing to stay within these laws, they reported that most tree cutting had been for charcoal production to sell (rather than domestic use) and this had now stopped. Some members reported taking part in tree planting activities with seedlings provided by local government and OPM.

### Case study – Sunday, trained in stove production



Sunday came to Palabek from South Sudan in 2021 with her sister and her young son. They are settled in zone 4 and she is the secretary of her farmers group. Earlier this year she was trained with 3 other group members to make Lorena fuel efficient stoves.

She is very enthusiastic about the stoves, explaining that they use far less fuel than traditional fires – you can make a meal with only two pieces of wood while with a traditional fire it takes six. The stoves are also clean (even your pots stay clean), and the smoke leaves the house through a pipe. They are also safe for children so they are not in danger of getting burnt.

Sunday attended a two-day training in stove making. On the first day they learnt how to take measurements and procure materials and on the second day they build a stove. She says the training time was sufficient because the trainers were very well prepared and could answer questions. Her group then received initial materials to set up a stove making business: wheelbarrow, mould, panga, spade etc. Since they finished training her group has built 9 stoves and has many more requests to fulfil. They charge 35,000 (£7.50) for a small stove and 80,000 (£16) for a larger one. She has also trained a neighbor in how to make the stoves.

Sunday is very happy to have this skill – she had not heard about this type of stove until she took the training. She hopes they can publicise their services so she can continue to make stoves for other people across the camp.

‘And also I have gained friendship of the women I work with, which is important to me.’

## **OUTCOME 3: GREATER CONFIDENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE OF REFUGEE AND HOST COMMUNITY HOUSEHOLDS**

### **Summary of activities Outcome 3**

Contributing to this outcome were trainings for group members in gender equality, life skills and nutrition and balanced diets. Sessions were held on group dynamics and leadership skills, conflict resolution and problem solving. Counselling sessions were conducted as a follow up of the psychosocial issues identified such as: school drop outs, financial hardship, gender-based violence and drug abuse. Diet champions were appointed and trained in each group to provide ongoing support to members and to represent issues to authorities. In the host communities, diet champions also worked with the community development officers to link members to business grant opportunities offered by the government.

### **Summary of achievements Outcome 3**

94% of farmers (1859 people -1626 women, 233men 23 PWD, 1,171 refugees) reported that their households were now eating a greater variety of foods. All groups had been trained on what constitutes a balanced diet, and the need to eat a variety of foods. Many farmers reported improved health due to better availability of vegetables and some talked of eating 3 instead of 2 meals a day, due to the time saved by having food available near the homestead. The provision of solar driers and tarpaulins was appreciated meaning that more food was available in the dry season.

72% of farmers (1434 people -1104 women, 329 men, 55 PWD, 1133 refugees) reported improved self-esteem as a result of the project. They talked of being able to speak out clearly in front of others and to follow up issues affecting them until they found solutions. Many expressed the importance of working with their group and that it had given them a greater support mechanism and improved social connections.

### **Case study: farmers group member**

Lily fled from South Sudan in 2015 with her two young sons. She now lives in zone 5 of the Palabek refugee settlement and is vice chairman of Mango farmers group. Six months ago, she gave birth to twin girls who are doing well.

Lily explains that Mango group was trained to grow climate resilient vegetables by VEDCO. Particularly they were taught row planting for quicker growth and weeding, how to make pesticide from maize husks and how to use mulch to keep the gardens moist in the dry season. They were also supported on how to plan their cropping to ensure enough plants were left to grow on to produce seeds. VEDCO provided them with good quality seed for their first crop and a top up after one year of the project. The group chose to grow cow peas.

In the last month, Lily produced two basins of cow peas for consumption and sale as well as enough seed to replant. She compares this to before the training and estimates this as three times as much as with previous seed varieties and methods. She sold part of the crop easily, as their group is known in the market as having good quality vegetables. She paid for school fees for her two boys, and treatment for the twins at the health center. She also bought staple foods such as maize as there are no longer any food distributions in the settlement.

Lily says she is pleased to be part of the group because it is unified and there is no fighting, even though they came from a war zone and are of different tribes. 'When you are alone you will not manage, but now I can help my sisters and they help me'. She saves 1-2000 UGX a week with the VSLA the group has started, which allows her to borrow money for small businesses and for school fees. In the future she would like to do more projects with the group such as poultry keeping or growing ground nuts.



### **Conclusion**

Despite some challenges, the project has been successful in its overall aim to increase the capacity for climate smart, market orientated vegetable production in northern Uganda. With limited access to land, refugees have succeeded in growing and marketing a variety of vegetables. Over £95,000 worth of seed has been reproduced and sold while over 43,000 people have benefited from increased access to local vegetables, improving their diet and health. Training on climate smart agriculture and has been embedded, allowing farmers to continue with these practices in future years. Awareness of environmental laws has increased, and farmers have adopted practices to help them to cope with the effects of climate change.