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UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR VISITS KARAMOJA SUB-REGION

By Michael Wangusa, UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO)



United Nations Resident Coordinator in Uganda, Mr. Leonard Zulu addressing community members in Naoi Village, Lopei Sub-county, Napak District at 18 February 2025 ©UN Uganda

UN Resident Coordinator in Uganda, Mr. Leonard Zulu undertook a field visit to Karamoja Sub-region from 16 to 19 February 2025. The purpose of his visit was to review progress of UN programmes' contribution to national transformation as outlined in the National Development Plan; to explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration with partners.

Mr. Zulu paid courtesy calls on the leaders of Amudat and Napak districts and held discussions with them on contributing to overcoming the development challenges faced by their districts.

In Amudat District, Mr. Zulu visited Loro Primary School, which has benefited from support for early childhood and development from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and improved nutrition and energy saving stoves from World Food Programme (WFP). He also visited a Spotlight Initiative project aimed at ending violence against women and girls through raising public awareness to promote behaviour change. One of the ways this is done is through community dramas, one of which Mr. Zulu watched. The Spotlight Initiative, which is funded by the European Union, is jointly implemented UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP. The implementing partners in Amudat District are Action Aid, Uganda Law Society, Cross Cultural Foundation Uganda, Rasing Voices, Communication for Development Foundation Uganda, BRAC Uganda, Forum for Women and Development, Karamoja Womens' Umbrella Organisation.

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A beneficiary of the Kaichom Horticulture Farm in Amudat District explains to UN Resident Coordinator in Uganda, Mr. Leonard Zulu (left) how the green house enable growing of vegetables in the dry season to boost their household nutrition. The initiative is supported by WFP working with AFI and Amudat District ©UN Uganda

In Napak District, Mr. Zulu visited a FAO supported pilot irrigation project, with an innovation of a solar powered pump used to draw water from a borehole to an overhead tank and through plastic pipes to wind assisted sprinklers covering a vegetable field of 2 acres.

Mr. Zulu also visited Moroto Technical Institute where out of school youth are being trained to obtain vocational skills including masonry, tailoring, carpentry and motor cycle mechanics with

support from UNDP under the UN Joint Adolescent and Youth Programme (UNJAYP).

The UN Resident Coordinator also held a meeting with NGO operating in Karamoja at which they discussed collaboration on addressing the key challenges in the sub-region including through promoting gender equality, economic empowerment, climate smart agriculture, education and health. 🌍



ICELAND SUPPORTS WFP'S ENERGY-SAVING STOVES INITIATIVE IN KARAMOJA SCHOOLS

By Emmanuel Okello, United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)



Jennifer in the photo on the left, before the energy saving stoves were introduced, and after ©WFP Uganda

In the heart of Karamoja, one of Uganda's most climate-vulnerable regions, a quiet transformation is taking place in the kitchens of schools like Loro Primary School.

Jennifer Namataka, 56, a school cook, ladles steaming hot porridge into bowls of the eager pupils. The school is embracing change brought by the installation of energy-saving stoves, thanks to a project spearheaded by the World Food Programme (WFP) with generous support from Iceland.



We used to cook on open fires made of three stones and use a lot of firewood," Jennifer says. "It would take me five hours to prepare meals, and the smoke was unbearable." Today, she spends just three hours cooking nutritious meals for the pupils. The energy-efficient stoves have reduced firewood consumption by a half, cutting down on cooking time, and significantly reducing smoke emissions, making her daily tasks much more manageable.

Karamoja's semi-arid landscape is heavily affected by climate change, with recurring droughts and environmental degradation further exacerbating food insecurity and malnutrition. Clean cooking technologies like the energy-saving stoves are pivotal in reducing deforestation, curbing emissions, and fostering land restoration.

Between 2023 and 2024, WFP equipped 74 schools in Karamoja with energy-saving stoves, a step that has reduced annual firewood usage from 11,755 metric tonnes to 4,702 metric tonnes. By saving an estimated 35,265 trees annually, this initiative has played a vital role in preserving Karamoja's fragile ecosystems, addressing the pressing issue of unsustainable firewood demand in school kitchens.

The energy-saving stoves intervention is part of WFP's larger mission to provide daily hot meals to 220,000 students across 315 primary schools in Karamoja. The Home-Grown School Feeding model ensures these meals are not only nutritious but sourced locally, creating a win-win for students and smallholder farmers. This initiative has bolstered food security, promoted education, and offered markets to farmers in the region.

Beyond environmental benefits, the new stoves are transforming lives, particularly for women and children. By reducing the time spent on cooking and firewood collection, women like Jennifer can focus on other income-generating activities or spend more time with their families. For students, the timely preparation of meals means they can concentrate better in class, fueled by warm, nutritious food.

Iceland's support has been instrumental in this transformation, highlighting the power of international collaboration in addressing pressing global challenges. In Karamoja, the simple yet impactful shift to energy-saving stoves is a beacon of hope for sustainable development and a healthier future for the region's children.



UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Leonard Zulu, cooking using the energy stove (top) and visiting the wood lot (bottom) during his visit to Loroo Primary School on 17 February 2025 ©UN Uganda

With a \$750,000 budget funded by the Government of Iceland, the 12-month project targets 215,000 students, 560 cooks, 250 entrepreneurs, and 40,000 community members in six districts. This has gone further to improve nutrition and introduce energy-efficient cooking solutions in schools across Uganda's Karamoja sub-region.

During this period, kitchens in 70 schools will be refurbished, including the introduction of fuel-efficient stoves that will reduce firewood use by 60%. In addition to training cooks, 80% of local households will benefit from promotion of clean cooking solutions. The project will also support the cultivation of biofortified crops like orange-fleshed sweet potatoes and iron-rich beans to diversify school meals, enhance nutrition, and facilitate knowledge transfer to communities.

Environmental restoration efforts include planting 1,500 acres of woodlots, while youth and women empowerment programs will establish 15 micro-enterprises for clean energy. The initiative aligns with key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) addressing climate action, education quality, gender equality, and sustainable consumption.

"It's not just about cooking—it's about the future of these children and the environment they'll grow up in, Jennifer says." 🌍

RICE-FISH FARMING IN THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY: South-South Cooperation is revolutionizing agriculture in Uganda

By Agatha Ayebazibwe, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)



Zakaria Wapali and his wife Anastasia Mwamula in Butaleja District ©FAO Uganda

Anastasia Mwamula roots weeds from her quarter-of-an-acre paddy field barefoot. It's a back-breaking exercise. But, at 51 years of age and with eight children to feed, she's gotten used to hard work.

Every morning, Anastasia and her 58-year-old husband, Zakaria Wapali, leave their red-brick home on the edge of a tiny village known as Scheme View to tend to this and other crops on their 15-acre field, a two-kilometre walk away. There, they grow cabbage, bananas, mangoes, maize, cassava, tomatoes and—of course—rice.

That's because Anastasia and Zakaria hail from Butaleja, a farming district that could easily be described as "the rice basket of Uganda."

Rice production in Butaleja was limited until the 1970s when a major irrigation scheme helped water the fields and compensate for shortages during the dry season. Today, most of the district's farmers rely on rice for their livelihood.

For years, Anastasia struggled with her rice yields. That is, until May 2024, when she met experts dispatched by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China to Uganda as part of a South-South Cooperation project implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with the Governments of China and Uganda.

Rice experts from China, together with their Ugandan counterparts, taught her essential techniques, such as improving the rice paddy's drainage and spacing seedlings properly. The results have been spectacular. Before, she harvested 100 kilograms of rice from her quarter of an acre paddy. Now it's closer to 400 kilograms.

Taihua Chen, the project's aquaculture expert, was also able to assist with another ambition of hers – integrating rice production with fish farming – known as rice-fish culture.

Back in 2005, Anastasia was intrigued by a programme on the radio that talked about the ancient Chinese tradition of breeding fish in flooded paddy fields. The idea behind this combination is that rice paddies offer protection and organic food for the fish, while the fish soften the soil and provide nutrients and oxygen for the rice crop. By feeding on insects and weeds, the fish also help maintain a perfect ecological balance that improves biodiversity without resorting to harmful pesticides.

Anastasia had wanted to try this practice but had been struggling with her shoal of catfish and native Nile Tilapia fish, which she kept in a pond next to her rice paddy.

“

In the beginning, I had challenges. I had no experience with fish. Feeding them was very expensive, and I didn't know how. The water wasn't sufficient, and the fish started dying," she says.

2 ZERO HUNGER

Chen showed her how to use readily available natural feed, such as snails and broken-up cabbage leaves, allowing her to use the money saved to buy more fish. She has since doubled her fish production to more than 100 kilograms. The next step involves creating that synergic relationship in her farm by introducing the fish into the rice paddy.

Anastasia says the neighbours often ask her why she's not buying new clothes with her newfound income.

She says she'd rather use the money to pay for the children's education. Asked whether there's anything she'd like for herself, she says with a blush, "I'd like to change my hairstyle, so that I can look better."

Longstanding ties

Uganda has a longstanding friendship and commercial ties with China. The Doho irrigation scheme in Butaleja, for example, was established by the Ugandan government in 1976 with help from the Chinese government.

China also has much to share with Uganda about feeding a growing population. Not long ago, large swathes of Asia faced hunger levels similar to those afflicting Africa today.

The two countries, therefore, seemed like a natural fit for FAO's South-South Cooperation programme, which offers a broad framework for collaboration among developing countries based on the concept of solidarity.

The aim of the FAO-China-Uganda South-South Cooperation (SSC) project is to increase the productivity of Ugandan farmers and help them produce more with less by providing them with training, technology and technical assistance across a wide range of areas, from crop production and animal husbandry to aquaculture and sericulture. The project is also designed to help farmers bring their products to market through value chain development and post-harvest handling. 🌍



Taihua Chen, the project's aquaculture expert, assists with integrating rice production with fish farming – known as rice-fish culture ©FAO Uganda

UK GOVERNMENT FUNDED NUTRITION PROGRAMS REDUCING CHILD WASTING IN SOUTHWESTERN UGANDA: Resolving domestic violence cases, community outreaches, family led MUAC approach, health education and sensitization are major contributors to the reduction of malnutrition cases in Southwestern Uganda

By Catherine Ntabadde, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)



Natukunda Tracy, (5 years) has her height measured using a height board during a nutrition clinic at Kikagati Health Center III, Isingiro District. The clinic is one of the community empowerment initiatives supported by UNICEF with funding from the UK government ©UNICEF Uganda

Anastasia “My grandson was weak. He was six months at that time, but you would mistake him for a 3-month baby. He was sickly and lifeless.

I thank the health workers and partners who assessed his nutritional status during a household visit outreach and discovered that he was severely malnourished. His life was saved after being admitted in hospital for treatment of severe acute malnutrition for 3 months,” says 52-year-old Grace Kokureta.

Kokureta is the grandmother of Mathias Ayesiga, who is now 2 years and 4 months old and is visibly looking healthy.

During a media field visit to Kokureta’s home in Rwakijuma Cell, Kyezimbire Village, Kikagati Sub-county, Isingiro District, Ayesiga kept on smiling while clinging on his grandmother.

UNICEF in collaboration with district authorities organized a media field visit from 16- 20 December 2024 to Isingiro, Kamwenge and Mbarara districts to witness the impact of programmes funded by the UK Government aimed at promoting good nutrition practices, services and quality food as means to savings lives and preventing child wasting.

Asked where Mathias’ parents are, Kokureta mentioned that her son is completing his undergraduate studies while the mother moved on and left the child with his grandmother.

Isingiro Assistant District Health Officer in charge of Environmental Health, Marion Alowo explained that during community outreaches and home visits, it was discovered that households experiencing domestic violence reported higher cases of malnutrition because often when the parents have disagreements, the mothers neglect taking care of the children.

She also added that in the district and southwestern region, several young mothers have sought employment outside Uganda leaving their children with grandparents who might not be in position to take good care of the children.

“We found that domestic violence is also contributing to cases of malnutrition in some homes. For instance, if a child’s caregiver is a stepmother, the attention they receive is limited. Also, families where the parents have disagreements, less attention is given to the children. We have cases of young mothers who give birth and leave the children with the grandmothers as they search for greener pastures,” added Alowo who doubles as the nutrition focal point in Isingiro District.

Cases of domestic violence are referred to the district’s community development officer for action including counselling and parenting orientation sessions.

Alowo’s explanation was confirmed by Kokureta who said that leaving the children with grandparents strains them because they must cater for two families. Kokureta revealed that most of the domestic violence in the households in her area results from lack of finances, limited access to various eats at home and unemployment.



A trainer conducts a session at a food demonstration organised in Kyezimbi parish, Kikagati Village, Isingiro district. Food demonstrations are some of the community centered initiatives supported by UNICEF, and funded by the UK government, aimed at improving the nutrition situation in Isingiro District ©UNICEF Uganda

Isingiro District hosts refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Rwanda, and South Sudan. UNICEF nutrition interventions in Isingiro, Kamwenge, Kikuube and Kyegegwa districts, funded by the UK Government target children under 5 in the refugee settlements and host communities.

According to Alex Mokori, UNICEF’s Nutrition Specialist, the nutrition programmes in Southwestern Uganda are aimed at preventing child wasting and other forms of malnutrition, increasing coverage of treatment services for children with severe acute malnutrition.

Some of the work undertaken under the UNICEF-UK partnership include:


- Supporting planning, implementation, coordination and monitoring of interventions including family led mid upper arm circumference (MUAC) through village health teams for screening and community treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) among young children
- Technical and financial support for last mile delivery of nutrition supplies through the National Medical Stores to regional referral hospitals and the health facilities in the four target refugee host districts
- Technical and financial support for on job capacity building of treatment of services for Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM).
- Support scale up of the integration of community nutrition actions that address stunting reduction in the four districts.
- Strengthening Infant and Young child feeding services at health facility levels on job coaching, mentoring and support supervision

- Strengthening micro-nutrient supplementation of Vitamin A supplementation and Iron and Folic Acid among children, adolescents, and women of reproductive age.
- Technical and financial support to district nutrition coordination committees to strengthen partner coordination for better emergency response in the four districts.

Dalton Babukiika, Senior Nutritionist Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital revealed that other causes of malnutrition in the region are attributed to alcohol consumption, selling of foods and vegetables, inadequate knowledge on how to prepare nutritious foods.

“Some families prefer to prepare quick meals. We have also had challenges with climate change which has affected our agriculture. The seasons have changed which has compromised the harvests,” he added.

Babukiika noted that increased education, food preparation demonstrations, community outreaches, rolling out of the family led MUAC approach, continuous assessment of children for malnutrition through the VHT systems and integration of nutrition programming into other sectors have greatly contributed to the reduction of malnutrition cases. Also, communities are more knowledgeable and can easily detect children who are malnourished, hence increased reporting and timely actions including referrals.

According to the Ministry of Health District Information System 2, the new monthly admissions of severe acute malnutrition cases in Isingiro District in 2024 are as follows: January 141, February 106, March 107, April 134, May 152, June 90, July 114, August 107, September 192, October 289. The average cure rate of the admitted children between January – November 2024 is 84 per cent. 



FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO FRUITFUL SUCCESS

Mary Edward, 46-year-old South Sudanese refugee, has turned hardship into opportunity in Kampala City

By Daniel Ssozi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)



Mary, a refugee from South Sudan, with some of her dried food products ©UNHCR Uganda

In 2016, conflict forced Mary, her husband, three children, and three other relatives to flee South Sudan, seeking safety in Uganda. Upon arrival, a friend helped her register as a refugee, and her uncle later assisted in securing a rental home in the city.

Determined to build a better life for her family, Mary pursued every opportunity to become self-reliant. She started by making and selling handicrafts and baked goods using a portable oven. As her ambition grew, Mary ventured into drying and selling dried cassava leaves - a good source of protein, minerals, and vitamins. With time, she expanded her product range to include dried okra, jackfruit, mangoes, and pineapples.

In 2023, she established Muhaba Pastries Store, a small-scale fruit drying business in Namungoona, a suburb of Kampala.

Her dedication paid off in 2024 when she secured a Quality Mark from the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS), allowing her to reach a broader market.

Despite the hardships and sorrow, she endured in South Sudan, Mary remains deeply connected to her homeland. This connection inspired her to name her business 'Muhaba', which means love in her native language, Juba Arabic.

From sourcing in local markets to expertly grading, washing, peeling, slicing, dehydrating, and marketing, Mary has shown her tireless work ethic and aspirational spirit. She acknowledges that UNHCR has helped her increase her earnings by offering opportunities to market and sell her products.

"UNHCR normally assists in helping us market our products, for example, during the Refugee Christmas Market. That was not the first time. I also marketed my products when I was still doing bakery at Munyonyo. There was a conference at Speke Resort, and through UNHCR, I was able to showcase my products at the conference," Mary said.

With support from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), a UNHCR partner in Kampala, Mary was able to register her business and acquire a Tax Identification Number (TIN) – which every official business needs to have – and obtained a trading license from Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), enabling her to operate as a registered business and expand to employ three staff, two refugees, and a Ugandan.

Mary's business now generates a monthly turnover of two million Uganda shillings, enabling her to cover her family's needs, including the children's school fees and rent. She expanded and acquired four commercial dehydrators and an expanded workforce, many of whom are family members. Today, she meets growing market demand through both her physical shop and online platform at muhabapastriesstore.com



My hope is that I can be able to export my products to other countries," Mary shared.

As Muhaba continues to flourish, one thing constant – every product is crafted with love and dedication, staying true to the meaning behind its name - Muhaba. 🌍



Dried fruits products on display at Muhaba Pastries Store in Namungoona, a suburb of Kampala ©UNHCR Uganda

STRENGTHENING FORT PORTAL'S ROLE IN UGANDA'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

By Janet Ndagire and Enoch Wanderema, United Nations Global Pulse (UNGP)



Participants gather for a group photo at the workshop, capturing a moment of collaboration and shared learning ©UNGP Uganda

Fort Portal City recently hosted a five-day workshop uniting cultural leaders, government officials, and development partners to discuss the future of tourism in Uganda's Rwenzori region.

The event focused on sustainable tourism practices and the role of technology in shaping the sector's future.

Participants collaborated to craft an action plan aimed at boosting tourism while preserving cultural and environmental heritage. The workshop included a unique team-building exercise, dividing participants into four "metamorphic families" named after local symbols: Kabarole, Saaka, Amooti, and Baboon.

The Kabarole family, for example, adopted the metaphor of a tree to symbolize the interconnectedness of efforts needed to drive sustainable growth in the region's tourism sector.

"We believe that you cannot support anything without passion and love," said a Kabarole family representative. The tree, they explained, symbolizes the passion and love that sustain every endeavour, with its roots "firmly planted in collective action and shared purpose."

Dr. Martin Gordon Mubangizi, head of UN Global Pulse Uganda, introduced the DataCities initiative, highlighting the role of data in building resilient cities. "We aim to build resilient cities through practical data initiatives." He outlined plans to digitize key assets like the crater lakes around Fort Portal to better manage tourism, ensure data protection, and foster community engagement.

Hon. Joan Kantu Else, Minister of Tourism for Tooro Kingdom, showcased the region's tourism potential, from the Rwenzori Mountains

to the Empaako naming ceremony and traditional bark cloth production. Local initiatives like the Tooro Cultural Youth Centre were praised for offering immersive cultural experiences, with Hon. Else emphasizing that these efforts are vital to the vision of a sustainable and culturally enriched tourism industry.

The workshop also underscored key challenges, particularly in infrastructure. Participants voiced concerns about the lack of clean and accessible toilets, food courts, shops, and reliable Internet, which are crucial for enhancing the tourist experience. "A destination cannot be promoted unless it meets the minimum required infrastructure standards," noted Simon Kaita from the Uganda Tourism Board.

Collaboration emerged as a central theme, with a strong call for unity between local authorities, national agencies, and private businesses. "Tourism in Fort Portal is beautiful but untapped," said James Mboijana Mugabi, Tourism Development Officer from Uganda's Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities. "We have the resources, but we need to be more intentional about promoting them."

The workshop also recommended creating a dedicated committee to secure funding for infrastructure improvements and marketing efforts, along with better connectivity to showcase Fort Portal's tourism potential globally.

"We must work together as one family," said a representative from the Amooti family, emphasizing the importance of collective effort. The event ended with optimism, as stakeholders expressed confidence that Fort Portal's tourism potential, combined with digital transformation and sustainable practices, will set a new benchmark for regional development in Uganda. 🌍

GLADYS MARY'S JOURNEY TO SELF-RELIANCE

By Phillo Aryatwijuka, International Labour Organization (ILO)



Gladys displays the shoes produced with her group under the ILO PROSPECTS MHPSS initiative ©BRAC Uganda

In the heart of Eden zone, within Rhino Camp refugee settlement, Madi-Okollo District, 35-year-old Gladys Mary is crafting more than just shoes, she's rebuilding her life. A South Sudanese refugee and a mental health survivor, Gladys has transformed adversity into opportunity.

For years, life as a refugee took a toll on her mental health. "Depending solely on the little food provided by the World Food Programme was tough. The uncertainty, the lack of independence was overwhelming," she recalls.

With support from the non-governmental organization TPO Uganda and UNHCR, she was fortunate to receive therapy, to address her mental health challenges.

This was a turning point that set her on a new path.

"Upon completion of my mental therapy with TPO, I was recommended to benefit from the ILO PROSPECTS Programme intervention on skills development and livelihood support for mental health survivors."

The ILO PROSPECTS MHPSS (mental health and psychosocial support) intervention, implemented through the non-governmental organization BRAC, aims to empower mental health survivors with skills and livelihood support.

Gladys was among 1,783 refugees trained in vocational skills such as knitting and crafts. She joined Wisdom Group, a group that was trained to produce craft shoes. Under the mentorship of a local artisan, she trained for three months, mastering the art of shoemaking.

After the training, ILO PROSPECTS provided a startup package. With this support, wisdom group rented a small space and began producing and selling craft shoes. In just two months, they had earned 1,700,000 Ugandan shillings.

But while the group moved at a steady pace, Gladys had even bigger ambitions. She took the bold step to start her own business, focusing solely on craft shoe production.

Today, Gladys earns 100,000 Ugandan shillings weekly, enabling her to meet her daily expenses and save 50,000 Ugandan shillings per week in her Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA).

“

I can now take care of my family and meet our basic needs. This program has changed my life," she says with pride. 🌈



LEVERAGING COLLABORATION TO COMBAT MPOX AMONG UGANDA'S MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

By Anthony Bugembe, World Health Organization (WHO)



WHO Anthropologist Dr Jerome Ntege training MARPI peers in Kampala Metropolitan Area on Mpox surveillance, risk communication and case reporting to protect key populations @WHO Uganda

As Uganda faces an ongoing mpox outbreak, the response is prioritizing innovation and inclusivity, particularly given the disease's disproportionate impact on Key Populations (KPs) such as sex workers and their networks.

These marginalized groups, often subjected to stigma, discrimination, and limited access to healthcare, are at greater risk during public health emergencies.

To address this, the World Health Organization (WHO) has partnered with Most At Risk Populations Initiative (MARPI) Clinic Mulago, a healthcare facility with a long-standing relationship with KPs, to develop a comprehensive surveillance and response strategy.

Mpox cases began emerging in Uganda's key hotspots, underscoring the need for a targeted approach to reach KPs. For individuals like Tracy, a sex worker in Kawempe, the appearance of unusual lesions caused immediate fear and confusion. "I was scared," she recalls. "I didn't know if it was something serious, and I was afraid of being stigmatized. But I trusted the MARPI team. They examined me with care and acted quickly. The support I received made me feel safe and cared for, like I wasn't alone."

Stigma and a deep-seated distrust of healthcare systems often prevent KPs from seeking timely medical care. The fear of judgment or rejection, compounded by the mobility of these populations and societal discrimination, further complicates access to life-saving support. "Reaching these populations is difficult," says Dr. Jerome Ntege, a WHO anthropologist involved in the response. "Without collaboration, many cases would go undetected."

WHO's partnership with MARPI Clinic aimed to empower communities through education and engagement. With MARPI's established trust among KPs, WHO implemented a strategic initiative to enhance mpox surveillance and response. Key aspects included training 40 MARPI staff members in mpox surveillance, diagnosis, and patient care; equipping 40 civil society organizations managers to mobilize resources and engage their networks; and educating 150 community peers - sex workers and other KP representatives - on how to recognize symptoms, report cases, and provide support within their communities.

The impact was swift. Community peers like Ruth Kyomugisha became trusted sources of information. "During the training, we learned how to spot symptoms early and respond immediately. This knowledge has saved lives," she says. Ruth's outreach through tools like WhatsApp posters led to the identification of suspected cases and connection to timely care.

Other testimonies reflect the success of the initiative. Ruth shares, "I shared a poster about mpox symptoms on my WhatsApp, and someone in my community reached out to me. I connected them with MARPI, and they got help. It feels amazing to know I played a part in saving someone's life." A bar attendant from Rubaga adds, "I thought I was alone in this, but MARPI found me, took care of me, and ensured I got treatment. The doctors and peers treated me like a person, not just a case. That made all the difference."

MARPI's proactive engagement remains key in identifying mpox cases among KPs, including individuals with HIV and those in informal sectors like bars. By leveraging peer networks and fostering trust, MARPI Clinic and WHO bridged the gap between these vulnerable groups and critical healthcare services. This peer-based approach created a sense of security for KPs who had previously avoided healthcare due to fear and distrust.

The collaboration, which will continue for several months, serves as a model for sustainable public health responses. "This collaboration has shown that by working together, we can reach even the most marginalized groups and make a real impact," says Dr. Elizabeth Mgamb, WHO Incident Manager for the mpox response. 🌍

TOGETHER TO END TEENAGE PREGNANCIES IN BUSOGA REGION

By Caroline Magambo, The Joint United Nations HIV/AIDS Programme (UNAIDS)



The Kyabazinga (centre) with delegation including the UNAIDS and UNFPA Country Representatives, Chair Uganda AIDS Commission, USAID, UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, Airtel, Uganda Health Advocacy and John Hopkins ©UNAIDS Uganda

In December 2024, UNAIDS with its co-sponsors (UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO) under together for SRHR appointed the King of Busoga William Gabula Nadiope IV as UNAIDS National Goodwill Ambassador for engaging men and boys to end teenage pregnancies in Busoga region.

The King was recognized during the commemoration of the International Men's Day on 13 December in Jinja, district. Cultural leaders are major opinion leaders in the communities. They play an important role in influencing behavior and way of life of people in their communities.

The UNAIDS Country Director Jacqueline Makokha, who was accompanied by the UNFPA Country Representative, USAID representative and its implementing partners, private sector companies and representatives from UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO presented the recognition plaque to the King as a men and boys champion for ending teenage pregnancies in the region.



The UNAIDS Country Director Jacqueline Makokha recognizing the Kyabazinga as the UNAIDS National Goodwill Ambassador for engaging men and boys to end teenage pregnancies in Busoga region ©UNAIDS Uganda

“Your Majesty, we look up to your leadership to engage men and boys to end teenage pregnancies in Busoga region,” said Ms Makokha, “UNAIDS looks forward to building our partnership to reach vulnerable groups such as young women and adolescent girls in the region to get Uganda on track to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.”

Through the Men are Pillars ‘Omusaadha ne Mpango’ campaign that is expected to run for 2-3 years, existing platforms of Obwa Kyabazinga are being utilized to mobilize one million men and boys in the region through giving them information on prevention of teenage pregnancies, early marriages and need to support the girl child access education in Busoga region.

As part of the campaign, earlier this year, the Kyabazinga flagged off the second edition of the MTN Busoga Masaza Cycling Championship. This edition was thematized on engaging and mobilizing men and young boys to play a central part in preventing teenage pregnancies in the region.

UNAIDS, through 2gether4SRHR project is implementing activities aimed at harnessing the leadership of the traditional leaders to reduce teenage pregnancies in the region. This situation presents devastating health consequences for the teenage girls and increases their vulnerability to HIV, diminishes their prospects to complete education, find decent work and contribute to Uganda’s economic growth. 🌍



RESTORING HOPE: 49 refugees in Uganda received UNESCO Qualifications Passport in recognition of prior qualifications

By Vincent Ogal, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)



UNESCO Qualification Passport recipients display their passports during the award ceremony in Kampala ©UNESCO Uganda

An awards ceremony was held in Kampala to present the UNESCO Qualifications Passport to refugees living in Uganda, recognizing their prior learning and qualifications.

Forced to flee their homes, refugees and displaced persons often leave behind more than just memories - they may also leave behind evidence of the qualifications that once gave them hope for the future. For many refugees and displaced individuals in Uganda, the loss or lack of recognition of their qualifications and learning can be a significant barrier to rebuilding their lives and integrating in host communities.

With the introduction of the UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP), refugees in the country are being given a second chance to carve out a pathway to higher education and employment. The UQP provides a universal tool to recognize skills and qualifications, using a standardized methodology, providing successful applicants with a universally recognized document to support them to access education and employment, leading to a brighter future in Uganda and, for some, abroad.

On 13 February 2025, 49 individuals were awarded the UNESCO Qualifications Passport at a ceremony in Kampala, officiated by the Minister of State for Higher Education, Hon. John Chrysostom Musingo and attended by other key education partners.

"Today, we gather to celebrate a significant milestone in Uganda's journey towards inclusive education," stated Minister Musingo,

reaffirming the government's commitment to making education, including higher and tertiary education, accessible to all, with a special focus on those who have been forcibly displaced.



Refugees worldwide are confronted with numerous barriers to higher education," said Ms. Louise Haxthausen, UNESCO Regional Director for Eastern Africa and Representative to Uganda. "That only 7% of refugees globally are enrolled in tertiary education is an alarming statistic that reflects systemic challenges, including financial, administrative, and social obstacles, that disproportionately affect vulnerable youth and hinder their access to lifelong learning," she added.

Ms. Haxthausen stated that UNESCO's Qualifications Passport stands as a vital tool, helping refugees and other vulnerable groups overcome barriers to education and employment.

Since the launch of the UQP initiative in late 2022, Uganda has made progress in promoting inclusive higher education for vulnerable



New UNESCO Qualification Passport holders in Uganda, 13 February 2025 ©UNESCO Uganda

youth, aligning with the country's legal and policy frameworks. The Ministry of Education and Sports has been instrumental in driving this initiative forward, with the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO playing a role in coordinating efforts.

The UQP initiative has served as a driver for the introduction of the Uganda Qualifications Framework, which will act as a standardized framework for recognition of qualifications, learning and skills for refugees and displaced individuals.

Renewed hope for the future

Refugees and displaced persons in Uganda currently face many obstacles that hinder their ability to access education, employment, and social services, including language barriers, stigma and discrimination, and social and financial exclusion.

Mr. Elizie Baguma, a former primary school teacher from Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, shared his story of displacement, leading to him seeking refuge in Uganda in 2016. He recounted the loss of his belongings and loved ones amidst the protracted conflict in the region. "When war broke out, I had to leave everything behind and the nearest country where I felt safe was Uganda. When I arrived, I faced many challenges including because I couldn't speak English. I had to rebuild my life from scratch, taking computer courses to enhance my skills. However, securing employment proved difficult."

Mr. Baguma highlighted the positive impact of the UQP: "The UQP will empower refugees like me to integrate into the Ugandan

job market and explore further education opportunities. This has granted us hope to rebuild our lives and contribute to our community."

Looking to the future

Participants at the event were united in their call for the adoption, widespread promotion and integration of the UNESCO Qualification Passport into government policy and frameworks in Uganda and the region.

"I would like to encourage all recipients of the UQP to work towards upgrading your standards and qualification to fit into labour market," said Mr. Mathew Crentil, UNHCR Uganda Country Representative.



The UNESCO Qualification Passport is our project and a government position because it is good for the socio-economic transformation and integration of the East African Region," said Hon. John Chrysostom Musingo, Minister of State for Higher Education. 🌍

IOM SUPPORTS RETURNEE MIGRANTS THROUGH TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

By Joyce Nakato, UN Migration/International Organization for Migration (IOM)



A returnee speaks at the handover ceremony at IOM Uganda offices in Kampala ©IOM Uganda

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has formally flagged off 15 returnee migrants to start technical and vocational studies.

At a function in Kampala last month, IOM Uganda Chief of Mission Sanusi Tejan Savage and Uganda Government Assistant Commissioner Milton Turyasiima handed over various scholastic materials to the students.

This skilling initiative, part of IOM's return and reintegration programme, is supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The 12 women and three men are being sponsored to study Information and Communication Technology, fashion and design, catering, beauty, and cosmetology and receive mentorship in Agribusiness. Additionally, the students will be supported to seek apprenticeship placements to enable them to concretize their learning.

The initiative seeks to address challenges faced by returned migrant workers, such as stigmatization, and inadequate reintegration support. Left unaddressed, these issues expose them to the risk of re-migration which could be irregular and unsafe.

Speaking during the launch of this initiative at the IOM Uganda Country Offices in Kampala recently, Jackline Mbabazi, formerly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, explained the reintegration challenges she faced upon her return to Uganda.

"I went to Saudi in 2019, and I came back to Uganda in December 2023. But when I returned, the money that I had been sending back home was nowhere to be seen. I could not go back [to Saudi] and I didn't have capital, so I was stuck. When I told people that I did not even have 1,000 shillings in my bag, they could not believe it and they thought I was lying. I could only sit in my room and cry every day"

Mbabazi is undertaking a course in catering at Gifted Hands Vocational training institute, while other students are attending partner institutions such as Buganda Royal Technical Institute.

According to the IOM Chief of Mission, the project aims to ensure sustainable reintegration and creation of a positive impact in returning migrants' lives.

"We as IOM facilitate safe, dignified and rights-based return and readmission and sustainable reintegration of migrants in their countries and communities," Mr. Savage said. "There has been a gap in return and reintegration and as IOM, we would like to work with the government to reduce the gap."

The Assistant Commissioner for Employment Services in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Mr. Milton Turyasiima, urged the selected migrants to make effective use of the opportunities offered by this IOM initiative.

"It takes an extra skill and hands to craft and make things. This is why IOM is taking the initiative to support and develop your skills so that you can put them to use. Do not finish the courses and go to streets to look for jobs, focus instead on self-employment and put those skills to work," he said.

The initiative is part of IOM's global Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program. Across the world, the number of migrants returning home increased by 4% from 54,001 in 2022 to 56,045 in 2023. 🌍



JUSTICE FOR HER PROJECT LAUNCHED TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR GBV SURVIVORS IN UGANDA

By Samuel Wamuttu, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)



(Seated Left-Right) Beate Farukuoye, Deputy Head of Austrian Embassy in Uganda; Anna Kiiza, Senior Prosecutor, Office of the DPP; Natasha Butorac, UN Women Programme Specialist; Dr. Flavian Zeija, Principal Judge; Dr. Katja Kerschbaumer, Head of Austrian Embassy in Uganda; HW Sarah Langa Siu Chief Registrar and Dr. Angella Nakafeero, Commissioner, MGLSD @UN Women



Dr. Zeiji delivering his speech during the launch at the High Court Conference Hall @UN Women Uganda

The Justice for Her project was officially launched at the High Court Conference Hall in Kampala on 24 February 2025, marking a significant step towards improving access to justice for women and girls in Uganda.

The initiative aims to address legal barriers faced by survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and to strengthen gender-responsive justice mechanisms across the country.

The launch event brought together key stakeholders, including representatives from the Judiciary, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, civil society organizations, development partners, and community justice actors. The Principal Judge, Dr. Flavian Zeija, officiated the launch and reiterated the Judiciary's commitment to advancing gender-responsive legal systems.

In his keynote address, Dr. Zeija emphasized the need for an inclusive justice system that protects the rights of all citizens, particularly women and girls who face systemic challenges in accessing legal remedies.

"Justice must be accessible, fair, and responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. The Justice for Her project is a crucial intervention in ensuring that survivors of gender-based violence receive the support and legal assistance they deserve," he stated.

The Justice for Her project aims to strengthen the capacity of the Judiciary to efficiently manage GBV cases by improving case prioritization, allocation, and information technology use in case management. It will also enhance legal literacy, build the capacity of judicial officers, and promote alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that ensure timely and survivor-centered justice.

Funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation, the project will be implemented by UN Women in partnership with legal aid providers and women's rights organizations. It will focus on the High Court Circuits of Masaka, Gulu, and Nebbi Magistrates' Courts.

Speaking at the launch on behalf of UN Women Uganda Country Representative, Paulina Chiwangu, Natasha Butorac, UN Women's Programme Specialist, highlighted the significance of the project in strengthening Uganda's justice response to GBV and ensuring women and girls access justice.

"We thank the Austrian Development Cooperation, the Judiciary in Uganda, and all partners. Access to justice is not a privilege—it's a right! The Justice for Her project will reduce case backlog, enhance victim support, and improve legal outcomes for GBV survivors. This is a step closer to justice for all," Butorac stated.

She also pointed out that delays in the justice system deny justice to many women and girls, with GBV cases in Uganda taking an average of 919 days to resolve. The project will fast-track GBV case disposal and improve survivor-centered approaches.

Dr. Katja Kerschbaumer, Head of the Austrian Embassy/Development Cooperation Office in Uganda, emphasized that survivors should no longer have to wait years for justice.

"This project institutionalizes daily GBV hearings, ensuring timely and fair case resolution. We want to ensure survivors are heard and cases are resolved without delay. No more waiting, no more impunity," she said.

The launch event was also attended by judges, judicial officers, and key stakeholders in the justice sector, underscoring a collective commitment to strengthening gender-responsive legal frameworks in Uganda. 🌍

JOVIA DRANZOA : A Young Voice for Change in Moyo

By Prisca Uwera, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)



Jovia Dranzoa a participant in the Strengthening Adolescents and Youth (SAY) programme ©UNFPA Uganda

In the heart of Uganda's Moyo District, where the rolling hills meet the border of South Sudan, a young woman named Jovia Dranzoa is making her voice heard. As a participant in the Strengthening Adolescents and Youth (SAY) programme, funded by the Danish Embassy, Jovia has become a powerful advocate for the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of her peers.

During a social accountability session in Laropi Sub-county, a stone's throw from the Nile ferry crossing to Adjumani, Jovia shared her experience as a youth leader to her audience including a team from UNFPA, Embassy of Denmark and the implementing partners. Trained by the Naguru Teenage Information and Health Centre, she is part of a network of young people who are engaging with their communities to identify SRHR challenges and advocate for solutions.

"The biggest challenge young people face is the lack of youth-friendly services," Jovia explained, her voice filled with passion. "We need spaces where we can access information and services confidentially."

Jovia and her fellow youth leaders are working to address this issue, advocating for functional youth corners in health facilities and pushing for healthcare providers to uphold confidentiality and respect for young people.

"I encourage health workers to remember their code of ethics and assure young people that their information will be kept private," Jovia emphasized.

The SAY programme has not only equipped Jovia with knowledge but also empowered her to become a confident advocate for her peers. "This programme has given me the courage to stand up and speak for young people who may be afraid to speak for themselves," she shared.

Jovia's dedication to empowering girls and promoting SRHR is inspiring. She sees a future where she can continue fighting for her community and ensuring that young people have the knowledge and resources they need to make informed choices about their lives.

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Knowledge is power," Jovia affirmed with a determined smile. "I encourage every young person to stay in school, know their rights, and protect themselves."

Jovia's story powerfully demonstrates the impact of investing in young people. Through programmes like SAY, UNFPA and its partners are empowering the next generation of leaders to create a brighter future for Uganda. 🌍



UNODC PARTNERS TO STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND COMBAT ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES IN UGANDA

By Angella Tusiime, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)



Sharon Nyambe (Left), Head of Office, UNODC in Uganda, hands over essential equipment to youth justice innovators to expand access to justice. ©UNODC Uganda

In a significant move to promote homegrown solutions and enhance access to justice, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Uganda has teamed up with the Justice Innovators Community of Uganda. This partnership aims to equip young justice innovators with the necessary tools to drive innovation and address legal challenges effectively.

During the handover ceremony of essential equipment, Sharon Nyambe, Head of Office for UNODC in Uganda, expressed her excitement about the local solutions developed by these young innovators. She emphasized the importance of supporting their creative efforts to improve access to justice. "It is inspiring to see young minds taking the lead in creating innovative tools and approaches that address the unique needs of marginalized groups in Uganda," she said. Ms. Nyambe highlighted that such initiatives not only nurture local talent but also contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable justice system.

Sarah Kekimuri, one of the young justice innovators, shared her gratitude for the support from UNODC and the Justice Innovators Community of Uganda. She noted that this support is crucial in motivating young innovators to expand their reach and deepen their impact.

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Receiving this kind of support not only validates our efforts but also empowers us to scale our initiatives and reach more young people who need access to justice," Sarah said. She added that the equipment will enable her and her peers to enhance their projects, benefiting even more marginalized communities across Uganda



The young innovators with representatives from UNODC in Uganda and Justice Innovators Community of Uganda ©UNODC Uganda

Hellen Mukasa, Team Lead at the Justice Innovators Community of Uganda, expressed her pride in the innovative solutions developed by the young justice innovators. She commended their creativity and dedication in addressing critical challenges within Uganda's justice system, particularly for marginalized groups.

This initiative, implemented under the "Strengthening Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme in Uganda" and funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, underscores the vital role of collaboration in fostering youth-led innovation and creating sustainable change in the justice sector. By empowering young innovators, UNODC and its partners are making significant strides towards building a more just and inclusive society in Uganda.

In another significant effort, UNODC in Uganda, in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Ministry of Water and Environment, hosted a two-day workshop to raise awareness about trafficking in timber and other forest products in Uganda. Funded by the EU under the EU-Uganda Forest Partnership, the event brought together public and private sector stakeholders to discuss the impacts of timber trafficking and explore strategies to combat this illicit trade.

Uganda faces significant deforestation due to illegal logging, unsustainable agricultural practices, urbanization, and other factors. The illegal timber trade contributes to environmental degradation, economic losses, and the erosion of the rule of law. The workshop aimed to foster collaboration among stakeholders to promote effective strategies to combat this illegal trade by strengthening enforcement, improving monitoring, and promoting sustainable forest management practices.



Participants engage in discussions on legal provisions and responses to timber trafficking in Uganda ©UNODC Uganda

By engaging both public and private sector actors, the workshop highlighted the importance of a united and multi-stakeholder approach in addressing illegal logging and timber trafficking. The collaboration between UNODC, FAO, and the Ministry of Water and Environment demonstrates a strong commitment to tackling these complex socio-economic, environmental, and governance challenges. 🌍



POSITIONING YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP TO DRIVE THE SDGS

By Joel Akena, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)



Josephine Anyu, Guild speaker from Uganda Christian University ©UNDP Uganda

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Julius Nyerere Leadership Centre (JNLC) and Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MoGLSD) have long shared a commitment to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This partnership aims to nurture and groom youth leaders across universities nation wide, equipping them with effective leadership competencies to address the rapidly changing economic, political, and social landscape of the country.

Josephine Anyu, Guild speaker from Uganda Christian University, is one of the beneficiaries of this partnership. She is maximizing her potential to effectively influence development policies and challenge the traditional narratives on youth in leadership.



I come from a patriarchal society where the voices of women and youth are silenced. This should not be the case. As I continue to grow in a leadership role as a young woman, I want to encourage all women out there, let's not shy away from taking up leadership roles. These roles empower us to amplify our voices and address the injustices within our society," says Josephine Anyu.





UNDP Resident Representative, Ms. Nwanne Vwedde Obahor at one of the leadership trainings in Gulu University ©UNDP Uganda

Amplifying youth voices and promoting their participation and leadership in public institutions, parliaments, the judiciary, and private sector is crucial for Uganda. We need more youth leaders like Josephine. Leaders who are change agents in environment conservation, climate action, climate-smart agriculture, innovative solutions, digitally sound and anchors for inclusive growth in their societies.

Uganda's youth have a central role to play in driving the SDGs. With a global population of over 1.8 billion youth, and over 80 percent residing in developing nations, there is a need to harness their potential. Platforms like the youth connect, facilitate connec-

tions, while initiatives such as the Youth4Business Facility and the Kabale/Makerere University hubs, provide spaces for innovation, support start-ups and creative industries.

Youth need to be involved more in the country's national development plan processes and should be strategically positioned to contribute to the 5 principles of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships. Uganda hosts 1.5 million refugees, the largest refugee hosting country in Africa, we need more youth leaders to champion conflict resolution, appreciate peace and play an active role in civic engagement. 🌍



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