



FEASIBILITY STUDY

CLIMATE RESILIENCE FOR REFUGEE AFFECTED AREAS AND REGIONS IN UGANDA

January 2023

Client: Royal Danish Embassy, Uganda

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This feasibility study was conducted by Anne E. Kobaek (Team Leader, Independent), Mauda Mugisha (Gender Expert, Independent), David Wozemba (Agriculture Expert, Independent). Each team member made meaningful contributions to this report.

The study team gratefully acknowledges the support given by Anders Bingen (TANA Copenhagen), Emil Skjødt (TANA Copenhagen) and Julian Brett (TANA Copenhagen) who provided guidance and support on technical and administrative manner throughout the study.

We extend a sincere thanks to the NURI Coordination Function and the Danish Refugee Council team in Kampala and the regional staff in the sub-regions visited by the study team members for their close collaboration and cooperation in the planning and execution of the study. The team would also like to thank these staff for their assistance in organisation of the field visit components. And we are particularly grateful to the many informants at national, regional and community levels who participated in the key informant interviews and who provided open, transparent, and reflective responses to our many questions. Lastly, we are grateful for the support, insight and guidance provided by the Royal Danish Embassy in Uganda Green Economy team, notably Ole Dahl Rasmussen, Victor Vuzzi Azza and Signe Røn Langelund Nielsen.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

aBi	Agriculture Business Initiative
AFARD	Agency for Accelerated Regional Development
ARUDFA	Arua District Farmers Association
CF	Coordination Function
CP	Country Programme
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
DDP	District Development Plan
DED	Development Engagement Document
DEF	District Engagement Forum
DFA	District Farmer Association
DINU	Development Initiative for Northern Uganda
DoR	Department of Refugees
DRDIP	Development Response to Displacement Impact Project
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GoU	Government of Uganda
HDP	Humanitarian, Development, Peace
HH	Household
IMC	Implementation and Monitoring Committee
IP	Implementation Partners
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KI	Key informant
KII	Key informant interviews
LLG	Local Level Government
NAP	National Action Plan
NARO	National Agriculture Research Organisation
NbS	Nature based Solutions
NDP	National Development Plan
NURI	Northern Uganda Resilience Initiative
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PDM	Parish Development Model
PDP	Parish Development Plan
PICOT	Partners in Community Transformation
RAU	Resilience Agriculture Unit
RDE	Royal Danish Embassy
REF	Refugee Engagement Forum
RHD	Refugee Hosting Districts
RI	Rural Infrastructure

RRP	Refugee Response Plan
SO	Strategic Objective
SPA	Strategic Partnership Agreements
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
SRP	Sector Response plan
STA	Strategic Transformative Agenda
TMEA	TradeMark EastAfrica
TOR	Terms of Reference
UPSIDE	Uganda Programme for Sustainable and Inclusive Development of the Economy
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Associations
WAY	Women, Adolescent, Youth rights empowerment programme
WBG	World Bank Group
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WRM	Water Resource Management
ZARDI	Zonal Agriculture Research Institute

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on NURI	Work closely with local government in alignment with all national and local policies and strategies (including DDPs and PDM) relevant to the intervention.
	Continue commitment to working directly and consistently with local partners (farmer groups and associations, VSLAs, CBO, CSOs) through existing structures.
	Continue farmer and HH approach with skills developments and continuous support through catalysing knowledge transfer.
	Ensure participation and inclusion of youth in the agricultural production sector.
Geography	Continue implementation in Northern Uganda.
	Expansion to West/Southwest as a pilot with possibility of scaling up.
	Focus on RHDs with attention to neighbouring districts based on needs.
Refugees	Adopt a pragmatic approach to government 50:50 host: refugee ration with flexibility and adjustment to local context.
	Continue active participation in local level coordination with OPM, UNHCR and DLG refugee liaison officers to ensure interaction with humanitarian sector.
Coordination and Alignment	Ensure alignment with government policies and frameworks.
	Continue active participation in CRRF, DP group, etc promoting identified key strategic areas for learning, experience sharing and influencing policy agendas at national level.
	Identify mechanisms for strong coordination of new implementation modality in order to formalise coordination and learning across geographical areas based.
Climate Change	Adopt a holistic approach to climate resilience of smallholder farmers with agriculture and environment as primary sectors and water and rural infrastructure as complementary sectors.
	Include environment sector focus through innovative activities for protection and regeneration of soil and biodiversity to support and promote a sustainable, inclusive and green transformation in Uganda inspired by NbS Standards.
Operational sustainability	Supplement production systems with market driven approach by maintaining focus on farmers and agriculture production and increasing commercialisation and market participation of farmers.
	Establish strong partnerships with private sector actors and financial institutions from the design phase.
	Risk analysis need to consider the trade-offs of a market driven approach with mitigating measure identified.
Gender perspectives	Mainstream gender throughout the project based on initial gender analysis.
	Ensure capacities and budget for gender sensitive services at all levels.
	Ensure strong linkages between a new phase of NURI and the Danida funded WAY project to maximize efforts of SRHR, GBV and WEE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Currently a new country programme for Danish development cooperation with Uganda – Uganda Strategic Framework (USF) is being prepared for the period 2023-2027. The upcoming bilateral development programme will continue supporting sustainable and durable solutions in refugee hosting areas and regions. One of these projects will focus on climate resilience for refugee hosting areas and regions. In connection with this the feasibility of a new phase of the Northern Uganda Resilience Initiative (NURI) is to be explored. In September 2022 the Royal Danish Embassy (RDE) in Uganda mandated a feasibility study on Climate Resilience for Refugee Affected Areas and Regions in Uganda.

STUDY PURPOSE AND AREAS

The objective of the study was to assess the feasibility of designing a programme that targets refugee-affected areas and regions and adequately responds to strategic objective 1 (SO1): *Promote sustainable and durable solutions for refugees and support Uganda’s stabilising role in the region* and Strategic objective 2 (SO2): *Promote a sustainable, inclusive and green economic transformation to adapt to the global climate crisis* of the Uganda Strategic Framework (USF) 2023-2027. In addition, the study should provide advice and recommendation concerning a new project which would be the successor of the currently implemented Northern Uganda Resilience Initiative (NURI) 2018-2022.

The feasibility study included the following study areas: building on NURI, geography, refugees, coordination and alignment, climate change, operational sustainability and implementation modality.

In addition, to the 7 study areas an additional section on gender was included in the study to ensure sufficient attention given to this topic.

The study was undertaken in the period from September 2022 to December 2022 with a mission fielded to Uganda in the period from 24th October to 2nd November 2022 by a team of three consultants. In the course of the mission visits to West Nile, Acholi and Southwestern sub-regions took place and a total of 50 key information interviews with relevant stakeholders were undertaken in the three sub-regions and in Kampala.

FINDINGS

Building on NURI

The current NURP programme is characterized by being flexible and adaptive with sufficient time and budget for inclusion and participation of relevant stakeholders throughout all stages of the programme from design. NURI has a strong alignment with government policies and plans from the CRRF all the way down to district and parish development plans.

NURI has taken a farmer and household centred approach with 200 agricultural extension officers engaged in continuous support to small holder farmers throughout the agricultural seasons. NURI has worked strategically with farmers groups and VSLA and has good experiences with linking the two. These are all practices to bring forward in a new phase of NURI by continue working with existing structures many of which created by the NURI programme.

Geography

A new phase of NURI will have a stronger focus on durable solutions in terms of local integration of refugees in Uganda and as such it is necessary to look at all refugee hosting areas in Uganda. Based on needs and opportunities, it is highly relevant for a new phase of NURI to continue engagement in the Northern Uganda building on strong local knowledge, experience and well-established links to local government systems and local communities.

In the West/Southwest of Uganda the number of refugees has increased in the past five years but unfortunately development support has not follow suit. Based on needs and experience NURI would be well positioned to expand as a pilot to the West/Southwest areas.

The CRRF in Uganda has traditionally focused on refugee hosting districts (RHDs) of which there are 12 of in Northern and West/Southwestern Uganda. However, neighbouring districts also feel the impact of the influx of refugees and a new phase of NURI should focus on RHDs but include neighbouring districts based on needs, opportunities and relevance in relation to NURI activities.

Refugees

In both the North and West/Southwest the influx of refugees has impacted host communities. Refugees and host communities alike experience high levels of poverty and food insecurity. The Government of Uganda has through the CRRF introduced a nexus approach to reach durable solutions with local government engaging in coordination of interventions in RHDs. Ensuring alignment with government policies and active participation in relevant coordination forum with humanitarian actors is necessary to address humanitarian issues through a development angle.

The high number of refugees that have entered Uganda in the past 5 years has increased the pressure on the host communities and the government has in the drafted CRRF Settlement Transformative Agenda II 2022-2025 introduced a 50:50 ratio in order to create an enabling environment for refugees to live in safety, harmony and dignity with host communities. A new phase of NURI should align with this government policy while at the same time be flexible in balancing between host and refugee communities as target groups based on needs, government policy, land tenure and likely outcome.

Coordination and alignment

The Government of Uganda has a strong policy framework which should guide any intervention in refugee affected areas. Programming according to policies and plans is necessary in support of government commitment to host refugees. In addition, participation in relevant coordination fora at national and district level offers great possibilities for alignment and nexus approach.

In terms of coordination another key learning from the current NURI programme is the importance of coordination between implementing partners which should be emphasised in a new phase of NURI.

Climate change

The country's number one priority response to climate change is adaptation in the context of addressing key vulnerabilities in sectors, building adaptive capacity at all levels, addressing loss and damage, and increasing the resilience of communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems. The new phase of NURI will have an opportunity to build on the learnings under the current NURI programme in terms of working with CSA, resilience design and green roads.

The high influx of refugees has had a notable impact on the environment in terms of degradation of farmable land, ecosystems and wetlands. An increased focus on enhanced and sustainable climate resilience provides an opportunity for a new phase of NURI to adhere to the IUCN Global Standards for

NbS and the Rio Marker.

At the same time, it is necessary to collaborate across multiple stakeholders including local communities, private companies and civil society to address the growing threat of climate change. There are opportunities for innovative approaches where companies and investors have a good business case and where local communities can benefit from adaptation initiatives.

When engaging in development or humanitarian aid initiatives it is important to bear in mind the potential impact of implementation. There is a need to examine possibilities of reducing emissions in the aid sector and a new phase of NURI should include a focus on greening aid. Implementing partners show willingness to adapt but requirements and budgets from donors will support and fasttrack this process.

Operational sustainability

In terms of livelihood, operational sustainability is achieved through a structural change in which the livelihood of target population becomes sustainable by farmers reaching a level in production in a way that promotes commercialisation and linking to markets driven by private sector actors. Issues of access to improved seeds, access to finance, information about market prices and access to markets were all brought forward as barriers to sustainable livelihood for farmers. A new phase of NURI should maintain a focus on farmers and agriculture production with the ambition of supplementing subsistence farming with commercial farming through a targeted intervention, supporting the farmers in linking to market systems while building on existing structures and institutions.

Introducing farmers into market systems does not necessarily mean sustainable resilience is reached. There are many flaws within a market and issues of exploitation need to be considered. In addition, there is the risk that an increased focus on commercial crops might have a negative impact on food security and nutritional needs of the family. Both factors need to be taken into account when risk analysis is made for a project so that mitigation initiatives can be included.

Implementation modality

Uganda has a high number of international NGOs operating in the country often with decades-long presence in country and an in-depth knowledge of context, opportunities and challenges. There is a large potential to find suitable implementors for a new phase of NURI through a competitive approach.

Gender

Women face greater risks and carry a heavier burden in relation to their ability to respond and adapt to livelihood challenges and climate change due to the inequalities they face. Household dynamics in these processes are rarely focused on and due to cultural considerations where males are taken to be the decision makers, it is likely that men made the decisions about the family farming systems, technologies and practices while women did most of the work.

There is a need for capacity development to be able to conduct in-depth gender analysis and deliver gender sensitive services. Using VSLA and family development plans where both women and men are focusing on common causes seems to be a more suitable entry point for women empowerment initiatives including SRHR, women economic empowerment and addressing GBV.

In this connection, there is a great opportunity for a new phase of NURI to create strong linkages with the Danida-funded UNFPA/CARE Uganda's Women Adolescents and Youth (WAY) rights empowerment programme, which is implemented in a number of NURI districts.

1 INTRODUCTION

Danish development cooperation in Uganda builds on more than 30 years of close collaboration between Denmark and Uganda. A cooperation that has focused on creating a stable Uganda after years of internal violent conflict. Denmark’s broad and deep relationship with Uganda covers political dialogue, development cooperation, humanitarian assistance as well as commercial cooperation and includes a wide presence of Danish civil society.

Over the years, Denmark has been a solid voice for democratic values and human rights in the country and a leading development partner in the efforts to ensure a strong and independent civil society. Denmark has also been a key partner to Uganda in sectors such as agriculture and water and has provided substantial assistance to Uganda’s stabilising role in the region by supporting the country’s progressive refugee policy.

Under the current Denmark-Uganda Country Programme (CP) 2018-2022 the Northern Uganda Resilience Initiative (NURI) is the largest of the three programmes implemented under the Uganda Programme for Sustainable and Inclusive Development of the Economy (UPSIDE). NURI is implemented in refugee affected areas and regions in West Nile and Acholi sub-regions in support of Uganda’s progressive refugee policy and the nexus between development and humanitarian action.

The strategic objective of NURI is “*Enhanced resilience and equitable economic development in supported areas of Northern Uganda, including for refugees and host communities* “. NURI promotes climate smart agriculture, agriculture related rural infrastructure, and water resources management. It also promotes village savings and loans associations (VSLA) and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and targets refugees and host communities, women and youths to ensure equitable development and peaceful coexistence.

The programme follows the implementation period of the country programme (CP) with an additional year of extension with the aim to further promote sustainability beyond the programme’s duration and inform the design of the planned follow-up programme. Total budget for NURI including the extension period is 370M DKK.

The NURI programme is implemented in 13 districts in West Nile and Acholi sub-regions with the majority of activities taking place in West Nile¹.

NURI has three main components divided into 3 programme outputs:

Output 1: <i>Climate change adaptation measures adopted by participating farmers</i>
Output 2: <i>Climate resilient agriculturally related rural infrastructure renovated and or constructed using</i>
Output 3: <i>Agriculture-related physical & natural water infrastructure constructed and made more resilient to climate change</i>

The overall management and governance setup of NURI is based on the concept of a decentralized unit, the NURI Coordination Function (CF) with a close connection to the Royal Danish Embassy (RDE) in Uganda. The programme uses a mix-modality implementation with some activities implemented directly by the NURI Coordination Function and its four Resilience Agricultural Units (RAUs) while other components are outsourced to local and international partners under supervision of the NURI CF.

¹ Agago, Kitgum and Lamwo in Acholi sub region and Arua, Madi-Okollo, Terego, Pakwach, Nebbi, Zombo, Koboko, Moyo, Obongi and Adjumani in West Nile sub region. The settlements include Rhino Camp (Madi-Okollo), Imvepi (Terego), Palorinya (Obongi), Maaji and Mungula (Adjumani) and Palabek (Lamwo).

Implementing partners (IPs) are two international partners namely Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and CARE and three local partners; PICOT, AFARD and Arua District Farmers Association (ARUDFA).

Currently a new country programme for Danish development cooperation with Uganda – Uganda Strategic Framework (USF) is being prepared for the period 2023-2027. The upcoming bilateral development programme will continue supporting sustainable and durable solutions in refugee hosting areas and regions. One of these projects will focus on climate resilience for refugee hosting areas and regions. In connection with this the feasibility of a new phase of NURI is to be explored.

In line with the current NURI programme, the aim of a potential NURI 2.0 project will be to support and improve the resilience of small-scale farmers in refugee affected areas and regions to shocks and stresses associated with climate change, climate variability and extreme weather events. A number of possible interventions are already identified including increasing productivity, sustainability and resilience of farming systems of small-scale farmers; promote household food security and engagement with markets; promoting biodiversity and sustainable management of environment and natural resources; improving availability and resilience of agricultural infrastructure and water resource management; combining VSLA and agriculture training. Focus being on improving climate smart agriculture outcomes while taking into account the need for social cohesion and peaceful co-existing between refugee and host communities and ensuring active participation of women and youth.

1.1 STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of the consultancy is to support the embassy in assessing the feasibility of a future intervention that targets refugee affected areas and regions. The strategic objective is to increase the capacity of the areas and regions to host existing and new refugee influx. The draft development objective is to increase resilience, raise incomes and build assets among refugees and nationals in refugee affected areas. One key outcome will be to strengthen agricultural resilience and productivity. The Consultancy will assess the feasibility of designing a programme that targets refugee-affected areas and regions, and adequately responds to Uganda Strategic Framework (USF) Strategic objective 1 (SO1): *Promote sustainable and durable solutions for refugees and support Uganda's stabilising role in the region* and Strategic objective 2 (SO2): *Promote a sustainable, inclusive and green economic transformation to adapt to the global climate crisis*. The study shall inform the embassy in deciding whether and how an intervention would be relevant. The consultancy will assess challenges, opportunities and feasibility of interventions that can support sustainable and durable solutions in Uganda as a country that host refugees from fragile neighbouring countries and then prepare a call for proposal for the project.

1.2 STUDY QUESTIONS

The feasibility study Terms of Reference (TOR see annex 1) included the following study questions:

- 1) Building on NURI: Which practices of NURI are important to preserve?
- 2) Geography: In how many and which geographical areas (districts/sub-countries) should a potential project be implemented, and what other issues should be taken into account, in order to maximize the possibility of achieving outcomes and minimize risks? Only refugee affected areas should be considered.
- 3) Refugees: How should a potential project balance between host communities and refugees as target groups to best contribute to durable solutions? How should the project interact with the humanitarian sector in the areas?
- 4) Coordination and alignment: How to feasibly coordinate with other interventions and align to government priorities?

- 5) Climate change: How can a potential project best contribute to enhanced resilience with a focus on environmentally sustainable agricultural methods and climate change adaptation, as well as mainstream reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.
- 6) Operational sustainability: How can a potential project best contribute to structural change at scale through the promotion of either 1) sustainable business models or 2) building of lasting institutions with sufficient funding and capacity.
- 7) Implementation modality: What is the capacity among potential implementing partners to coordinate and implement a potential project.

1.3 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The approach and data analysis methods described herein are generally consistent with the methodology outlined in the Mission Preparation Note (MPN) approved by the RDE prior to the start of data collection (annex 2).

The methodology used for the study was a mix of in-depth, key informant interviews (KIIs) and desk review of relevant documents. Prior to the field mission in Uganda a study framework was developed to guide the desk review. The study framework was based on the seven focus areas mentioned in the TOR as reproduced above. The framework guided the team in identifying relevant questions for the interview guides to be utilised during the KIIs. (The study framework can be seen in annex 3.)

The study team began the exercise by conducting a desk review of key documents provided by RDE, notable NURI programme documents along with government policies and strategy documents useful for placing NURI and the feasibility study in context.

The study team integrated findings from the desk review in the primary data collection process by informing the key informant interviews (KIIs) respondent list and interview guides. At the same time, desk review and secondary data collection was an ongoing and iterative process, where findings from KIIs and field work prompted further exploration of key documents.

Primary data collection was conducted in West Nile, Acholi and Southwestern sub-regions as well as in Kampala during the field mission which took place from 24th October – 2nd November 2022. The study areas were identified jointly with the RDE. Interviewees including staff from NURI CF and RDE, implementing partners, government officials, national and international NGOs, research institutes, private sector actors and international organisations/development partners. The identification of informants at district level was done jointly with NURI CF for West Nile and Acholi sub-regions and DRC for Southwestern sub-region.

The study team conducted and captured interview notes for a total of 50 KIIs of which 12 took place at national level and 38 took place at district level (further information regarding the consultation with stakeholders can be found in annex 4, 5 and 6).

At the end of the field mission the study team conducted a debrief with staff from RDE and NURI CF in order to receive further comments and input regarding findings and way forward. Key findings were presented to relevant stakeholders from civil society during a consultation meeting on 8th December 2022. During this meeting representatives from 34 INGOs and NGOs were consulted within areas of the study framework to obtain additional input to the process.

During the inception period it was agreed with RDE to expand the feasibility study by including visits to both NURI programme areas of West Nile and Acholi as well as including an addition refugee-hosting area in the Southwest of Uganda. In order to cover all geographical locations within the given timeframe and budget the study team had to split up and cover a sub-region each so that all interviews

conducted outside of Kampala were undertaken by one team member.

2 FINDINGS

This section presents findings and conclusions for the seven study areas as well as a separate section on gender perspectives. Recommendations are embedded in the narrative and provided in list format in the recommendations section.

The study team recommends that the findings be considered as providing an overview of needs, opportunities and barriers within relevant geographical and thematic areas. The findings provide important insights to guide the upcoming strategic discussions and decision-making needed to sharpen the process of preparing a new phase of NURI bearing in mind that the study is not an evaluation of the current programme.

2.1 STUDY AREA 1: BUILDING ON NURI²

The existing NURI programme provides a strong foundation for future engagements in terms of addressing resilience in refugee affected areas based on values, experiences and learnings obtained during implementation of the programme. NURI is perceived positively by all stakeholders at both district and national level and is considered as a lead implementor of climate smart agriculture (CSA) within the agriculture sector. In addition, NURI is highly appreciated for an inclusive and participatory approach working closely with all stakeholders including district local government (DLG), knowledge partners such as Zonal Agriculture Research Institute (ZARDI), NGOs and the farmers. The NURI programme has included sufficient time for inclusion and participation throughout all stages of the programme from design of specific activities, through implementation and to monitoring and evaluation of completion. The NURI CF team is highly knowledgeable and has in-depth understanding on the context they operate in and strong relationship with relevant stakeholders. Danida is well recognized as a brand that is strong and highly respected across stakeholder groups known for high quality through long-term interventions that responds to needs on the ground .

From conversations with NURI CF and IPs it is understood that a flexible approach to adjust activities when learning occurred has supported a culture of reflection and learning based on first-hand knowledge of local context, opportunities, challenges and barriers. One example mentioned by NURI CF staff is that of linking farmer groups with VSLA and ensuring planning cycles are aligned. Based on the positive results seen this is now promoted throughout the programme. It means that employed methodologies are already tested, adjusted and transferable in terms of a new phase of NURI, if described properly.

The NURI programme has included development of local capacities from community level all the way to DLGs. Capacities have been developed in terms of skills, knowledge and practical application of these. The participatory focus with engagement of target population and local partners including government officials based on the parish development model (PDM), parish development plans (PDPs) and district development plans (DDPs) has been highlighted as important components in terms of ensuring relevance and creation of ownership. As a result, the NURI approach aligns perfectly with the Danida way of operating and should be carried forward to a potential new phase. Key stakeholders also mention this approach as an important means to mitigate potential conflict between host and refugee communities.

² It should be noted that this section does not capture all learnings from NURI that is recommended to be carried forward. Throughout the report there are referrals to learnings from NURI highlighted and brought forward in relevant sections of this report.

It is a clear recommendation that a new phase of NURI should continue to build on above mentioned methodologies as a point of departure. The methodologies should be employed with the aim of reaching a more holistic approach to achieving the goal of self-reliance and resilience. Whereas the existing NURI programme works with CSA, rural infrastructure (RI) and water resource management (WRM) as three separate outputs, these should be merged so that a new phase of NURI takes point of departure in the needs, opportunities and barriers of farmers and communities in order to reach sustainable durable solutions based on sustainable food security and livelihoods.

Consultations with NURI CF and IPs as well as desk review of NURI reports highlighted several factors required in order to reach the status of self-reliant and climate resilience:

- Support to addressing impacts of climate change: improved seeds, CSA training, early warning system, information about weather patterns, diversification of livelihood, new technologies for increased resilience.
- Support to increase production and livelihood: skills and input to increase productivity per acre farmed, sustainable water sources, access to improved seeds, animal traction, VSLA engagement, financial literacy, marketing knowledge, market information, access to finance, access to markets, improved markets, access roads, introduction to value addition and value chains, increased cooperation with private sector actors.
- Improved social cohesion: a better understanding of gender dynamics and advantages of working together in households (HHs), introduction to integrated family development planning, introduction to integrated sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence (GBV), cooperation between members of community (host and refugee), district local government (DLG) lead community planning according to Parish Development Model (PDM) and district development plans (DDPs).
- Promote preservation of environment and restoring of ecosystems: CSA, landscaping, community engagement, tree growing, alternative energy sources, exposure to best practices in Nature based Solutions (NbS), building of capacities at local level to address environmental issues.

The list above is not exhausted and needs vary from location and situation of host and refugee communities. Newly arrived refugees face serious constraints in terms of smaller and smaller plots of land being allocated and the quality of the land does often not support agricultural production. NURI has its strength in agricultural production and should continue supporting this aspect, since there is a clear need for this kind of intervention in refugee affected areas and regions.

Working with youth participation in agriculture production holds some challenges. There is a general acknowledgement that youth are less interested in agricultural production and are more interested in other aspects of the agriculture value chain or in green jobs. This was confirmed by stakeholder consultations with NURI CF staff, IPs and NGOs. However recent reports such as NURI Monitoring Survey 2022 shows increased interest and participation of youth in agriculture production. Though the reason for this increase is unclear it shows a positive trend in terms of youth inclusion in a new phase of NURI. Young people between 15 and 24 years constitute approximately 20% of the population in both refugee and host communities, whereas persons below 15 years of age is 57 % of refugee population and 47% of host population. Youth unemployment is currently 80% in refugee settlements due to lack of skills and limited access to capital for investment.³ These numbers indicate that the issue of youth unemployment needs to be considered during project design. Experiences of NURI and other development projects show there are opportunities to ensuring increase participation and inclusion of youth within agriculture value-chains and within the green economy as long as special attention is

³ Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework Uganda, The Way Forward (October 2017). July 2019

given to this issue.

Other development actors implementing long-term development programmes like NURI tend to focus more on systems level, whereas NURI has farmers, households (HHs) and communities at the centre of the programme. The World Bank Group (WBG) funded Development Response to Displacement Impact Project (DRDIP) and the European Union (EU) funded programme Development Initiative for Northern Uganda (DINU) are two such programmes which focus on government enhancement through capacity development and support to large scale RI and WRM components and on value chain development of major crops. DRDIP and DINU have adopted the CSA model from NURI, but implementation differs in terms of community engagement and participation. A clear example being the agriculture extension model deployed by NURI with regular and consistent follow-up visit to farmers ensuring support throughout the agricultural seasons.

There are great possibilities for creating linkages between different development programmes. DRDIP is active in refugee hosting districts (RHDs) across the country while the WBG funded Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) is active in non-RHDs in Northern Uganda. The EU Trust Fund is funding several consortiums lead by INGOs within livelihood, refugee, and environment sectors. To capitalize on other development initiatives, potential implementing partners must conduct a thorough analysis of the broad range of issues linked to agricultural production to capture the complexities a farmer in refugee affected areas face. Future implementing partners must display a strong contextual understanding of these and propose ways to address barriers and opportunities either through linking with other development initiatives or – when this is not possible - including these in the project design. Social issues, gender issues, market systems and environmental concerns are all aspects that need to be addressed either by project activities under a new phase of NURI or by linking up to other development initiatives.

Key recommendations

- Continue adherence to principles of transparency, inclusion, and participation throughout the project cycle. In addition, project design must ensure flexibility and adaptability for adjustment as per changes in context and implementation.
- Work closely with local government in alignment with all national and local policies and strategies (including DDPs and PDM) relevant to the intervention.
- Continue commitment to working directly and consistently with local partners (farmer groups and associations, VSLAs, CBO, CSOs) through existing structures.
- Continue farmer and HH approach with skills developments and continuous support through catalysing knowledge transfer.
- Ensure participation and inclusion of youth in the agricultural production sector.

2.2 STUDY AREA 2: GEOGRAPHY

The existing NURI programme is implemented in refugee affected areas and regions in Northern Uganda as a livelihood programme focusing on agricultural production. A new phase of NURI will have a stronger focus on durable solutions in terms of local integration of refugees in Uganda and as such it is necessary to look at all refugee hosting areas in Uganda and examine the possibility of a new phase of NURI expanding into new geographical areas.

As part of the feasibility study the consultant team has been requested to explore the geographical reach of a new phase of the NURI programme. For an in-depth analysis of the refugee situation in Uganda the technical brief produced alongside this report should be consulted. Since the choice of

programme area is a strategic decision to be undertaken by RDE this section will focus on highlighting opportunities and challenges linked with selecting geographical locations.

2.2.1 NURI IN REFUGEE HOSTING AREAS AND REGIONS

The influx of South Sudanese refugees continues with the office of the prime minister (OPM) reporting 10,000 new arrivals in Northern Uganda in January to October 2022 alone. Newly arrived refugees need support to start the process towards local integration and self-reliance.

Humanitarian activities have limited funding with a specific focus on life-saving activities thereby mostly not including livelihood activities in their support. Often the support is short-term without a significant longer-term impact on the situation of the newly arrived refugees. For this reason, it is highly relevant for a new phase of NURI to continue engagement in the Northern Uganda.

The Danish government has close to two decades of engagement in Northern Uganda and as a result the Danida brand is very strong at community level, with district local governments and with humanitarian and development actors. The time and effort it takes to build strong relationships and good engagement based on trust and delivery should not be underestimated and should be build further on. A new phase of NURI will build on strong local knowledge, experience from implementation and well-established links to local government systems and local communities.

The current NURI programme has invested heavily on building capacity of DLGs and local partners. The understanding and ownership of NURI programme components were well demonstrated by relevant stakeholders including government entities, local and international partners, and research facilities. All of this will enable a smooth transition to a new phase of NURI.

Staying in Northern Uganda would mean capitalising on decades of development activities with opportunities for both diving deeper into the supporting existing farmer groups and expanding by including new refugee and host communities. It is deemed highly feasible to continue working in the Northern region though with an increased focus on refugees within the region.

2.2.2 EXPANDING TO WEST/SOUTHWEST

There is a case to be argued for expanding into the RHDs in the West/Southwest of Uganda. The number of refugees has increased in the past five years and the influx of Congolese refugees continues due to the situation of insecurity across the border. Refugee and host communities are facing challenges similar to those of RHDs in the North.

Expanding into the West/Southwest would provide opportunities to support an underfunded area characterised by interventions often being of a short-term nature and limited in impact. Development partners, humanitarian actors and government officials all confirm that until recently donor focus has been mainly on Northern Uganda leaving the West/Southwest falling behind in terms of development support to refugee and host communities.

Key informants within OPM Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) secretariat and the Department of refugees (DoR) expressed a wish to see the Danish government involved in the West/Southwest. Working in all major refugee hosting areas across the country, would provide a stronger political platform for the embassy in Kampala, something other development partners have noted as a strategic advantage.

Expanding to the West/Southwest will increase the opportunities for learning across the different programme areas. There are differences between the North and West/Southwest that would have an impact on the outcome of programme interventions such as access to land, soil types, mindset of

target population, access to markets and technology, etc. It is of interest to mention that from consultations with stakeholders in West/Southwest it was learned that CSA was a known approach but not one that had been widely introduced by development partners yet. The experience from NURI would provide a valuable contribution towards introducing CSA in this area. This provides opportunities for cross-learning and for the embassy to influence at policy-level based on a broader evidence base. The same opportunity would be present in terms of presenting best practices from a future NURI programme on environmental protection and working with NbS.

Including RHDs in the West/Southwest in a new phase of NURI would present several opportunities but also additional costs. The cost of starting up in new locations can be significant. This both in terms of capacity development of government entities and local partners as well as introducing the methodology used successfully by the NURI project.

Phasing out the NURI CF will leave this task to implementing partners who might have less knowledge and understanding of the participatory and inclusive approach of Danida. In terms of alignment and coordination this would also require further investments depending on the implementation modality and whether one or more organisations would cover parts or all the programme intervention areas. Though coordination across geographical locations would be costly, it is deemed a sound investment to ensure learning and collection of evidence across all programme locations. Most stakeholders consulted expressed a wish for more cross-learning and opportunities to support government policies translated into sustainable activities.

There is a clear need for support in the West/Southwest. A new phase of NURI could make a significant difference in the area, and it would be advisable to respond to the political push from GoU and development actors to support efforts to address challenges of the impact of high numbers of refugees in West/Southwest.

As mentioned, spreading programme activities widely across several sub-regions would incur costs and might also entail a risk of spreading too thin in terms of depth and sustainability. Development partners facing similar challenges are currently introducing project components in West/Southwest at a smaller scale compared to initiatives in Northern Uganda as a way to start engaging in West/Southwest. This could be seen one potential option for RDE, especially considering the possibility of securing further funding in the future and thereby having the ability to scale up in West/Southwest.

2.2.3 CHOICE OF TARGET DISTRICTS

The current NURI programme operates with the broad definition of refugee-affected areas and regions and has interventions in RHDs as well as districts not classified as RHDs. Likewise, the USF 2023-27 works with an equally broad definition using the term refugee affected areas and regions which provides valuable flexibility for programming. However, at project level it would be advisable to work according to Government of Uganda definitions and policies for purpose of alignment and coordination. The CRRF in Uganda has traditionally focused on the districts that are hosting refugee settlements; the so-called RHDs of which there are 12 of in Northern and West/Southwestern Uganda.

The new phase of NURI provides an opportunity to refocus and strengthen the work done in RHDs. In these districts the needs are high, and the expertise developed during NURI would be particularly beneficial to the target population. However, it is important to note that the focus on RHDs would mean less attention to other districts in refugee affected areas such as neighbouring districts and areas with self-settled 'refugees'. A new phase of NURI should include such districts based on needs, opportunities and relevance in relation to NURI activities. Examples of such districts are Moyo and Zombo.

A decision to re-define the geographical focus in a new phase of NURI would mean phasing out of current programme areas considered as non-RHDs such as Nebbi and Pakwach districts to mention a few. It is understood that there are issues of political economy at stake and that neighbouring districts have advocated strongly for inclusion in development programmes targeting refugee-affected areas. Though needs of the local population in non-RHDs should not be disregarded it is important to differentiate between the situation and needs of the different districts. Whereas RHDs are impacted by high numbers of refugees, which is felt in terms of land use, environmental impact, increase food insecurity, neighbouring districts face issues of increased pressure on social services such as health and education facilities but also increased opportunities and gains from refugees integrating into the communities.

A new phase of World Bank Groups funded NUSAF is about to be launched being implemented in non-RHDs with social service and livelihoods including a CSA component. It would be a unique opportunity for the RDE and the NURI team to phase over programme components in non-RHDs from NURI to NUSAF 4 to ensure that non-RHDs still benefit from support to DLGs and the population.

Other parts of Northern Uganda in which Danida holds a historical relationship are still challenged by issues of poverty, food insecurity and climate change. However, a new phase of NURI should maintain a clear focus on refugee responses and the nexus approach in addition to avoiding the risk of spreading too thin and thereby missing the opportunity of in-depth programming. It is advisable for the RDE to explore opportunities for maintaining a presence in historical Danida areas through other development engagements of the USF 2023-37.

Key recommendations

- Continue implementation in Northern Uganda based on needs of host and refugee populations, experience within the agriculture sector, relationship with local stakeholders and capacity of existing structures and institutions built.
- Expansion to West/Southwest as a pilot with possibility of scaling up.
- Focus on RHDs with attention to neighbouring districts based on needs, opportunities and relevance in relation to NURI activities.

2.3 STUDY AREA 3: REFUGEES

Uganda is currently hosting more than to 1,5 million refugees. The situation for refugees across Uganda is dire and the need for further engagement in creating durable solutions and supporting host and refugee communities is both eminent and strongly requested from all stakeholders. In both the North and West/Southwest the influx of refugees has impacted host communities. Refugees and host communities alike experience high levels of poverty and food insecurity. In addition, the high dependency on rain-fed agriculture continues to make refugee and host populations vulnerable to climate change with an increased number of shocks reported in all RHDs as well as across the country.

Below table provides a quick overview of key figures:

	Northern Regions	West/Southwest Regions
Refugee population	839,947 (55%)	490,593 (32%)
Poverty rate refugees	60%	28%
Food insecurity – refugees	85%	89%
Food insecurity – host	62%	65%
Food aid (WFP) daily calorie intake	60-70 %	40%

2.3.1 WORKING WITH HOST AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

High influx of refugees in a district has a clear impact on host communities who often themselves live in multidimensional poverty in terms of education, health, living standards and economic and financial inclusion.⁴ Addressing durable solutions in terms of local integration must give due attention to ensuring peaceful co-existence between host and refugee communities. Interventions not including both host and refugees can lead to issues such as members of host communities registering as refugees to receive support, potential conflict growing between host and refugee communities or hostility towards implementation partners.

The CRRF gave renewed and more prominent visibility to host communities, catalysing a shift in the geographical focus of Uganda's refugee response from the settlement location to the area that is hosting them. The introduction of a 70:30 policy in the CRRF Settlement Transformative Agenda (STA) 2016-2021 ensured 30% of humanitarian funding benefitting the host communities had a large positive impact on increased co-existence between refugees and the host communities.

However, the increasing number of refugees that have entered Uganda in the past 5 years has increased the pressure on the host communities and the government has in the drafted CRRF Settlement Transformative Agenda 2022-2025 introduced a 50:50 ratio in order to create an enabling environment for refugees to live in safety, harmony and dignity with host communities. Under Pillar 4 of the CRRF Settlement Transformative Agenda II (STAI) the objective of peaceful co-existence strategies is to implement a 50:50 ratio, supporting both refugee and host communities in mindset change and social behaviour change and ensuring more funding for integrated groups for both refugees and host communities.

During engagement with relevant stakeholders being government officials and funding and implementing partners it became clear working with a 50:50 ratio in implementation calls for a pragmatic approach with flexibility and adjustment to local context. In order to contribute to durable solutions, a new phase of NURI should be flexible in balancing between host and refugee communities as target groups based on needs, government policy, land tenure and likely outcome. It was stated by most key informants (KIs) that what was most important was working within the local context and in clear cooperation with local authorities and communities. A host:refugee ratio is considered a mitigation tool in connection with increased risk of tension and conflict between host and refugee populations. As such it is important not to see this as a fixed ratio to be applied rigidly in each intervention but rather to use it as a guidance to ensure focus on inclusion and consultation to mitigate any possible conflicts within communities and as an opportunity for local integration.

Project design and specific interventions should include conflict analysis and consultation with and inclusion of all relevant stakeholders to ensure ownership and transparency in decisions regarding ratio. Host and refugee population size as well as needs, challenges and opportunities in specific locations should be the main driver of interventions. KIs mentioned several opportunities for an integrated approach with host and refugees working jointly to increase resilience, livelihood and environment protection. Examples from NURI and other development actors shows great results when working with mixed groups and this should be continued where possible.

It was however, also acknowledged that in certain situations the two groups might have different needs that require different types of interventions. One clear example could be refugees allocated rocky plots residing far from farmable land and as such requiring introduction to alternative income-generating activities to increase resilience.

⁴ Uganda Bureau of Statistics, Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2022

When it comes to environmental protection and restoring eco-systems it is vital to work with host communities – either exclusively or jointly with refugee groups depending on the population in the area – since land is owned by the host communities and their engagement in protection of the environment is vital for sustainability.

Building on experience of NURI there is great opportunity to align with the STA policy of a 50:50 ratio but allow ample flexibility so that project and activity design take into account the situation on the ground and the need of the population being host or refugee.

2.3.2 COORDINATION WITH HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

The GoU is strongly promoting the operationalisation of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus approach, bridging humanitarian and development dimensions in the refugee response. Danida will be supporting this approach by increased engagement in a long-term developmental response in RHDs by including both host and refugee populations and through continued engagement in coordination at local level with relevant stakeholders in the humanitarian sector.

Only recently was the importance of DLGs in RHDs recognised and as per the National Development Plan (NDP III) coordination of all activities within a district should fall upon the DLGs. KIIs with OPM, UNHCR and DLGs all pointed in the same direction namely awareness of the importance of DLG taking over the responsibility of coordination with support from OPM and UNHCR. It was noted by several stakeholders that in practice the transition is moving slowly. A few of the districts consulted have progressed greatly and is reporting full lead on coordination with some having a refugee liaison officer on staff to facilitate this work. In other districts the transition is still ongoing, and progress is slowed by limited capacities at DLG level to take over this task and reluctance from OPM/UNHCR to hand over the responsibility. However, it is important for the new phase of NURI to continue to support this process, since involvement of DLGs in the coordination leads to greater social cohesion in communities as well as a significant move towards the HDP nexus.

Key recommendations

- Adopt a pragmatic approach to government 50:50 host:refugee ratio with flexibility and adjustment to local context.
- Continue actively participation in local level coordination with OPM, UNHCR and DLG refugee liaison officers to ensure interaction with humanitarian sector.

2.4 STUDY AREA 4: COORDINATION AND ALIGNMENT

The CRRF of the Government of Uganda is a strong policy framework for development partners to align with. It covers most aspects of the refugee response and is clear in its ambition and vision. In addition, the GoU has progressed greatly in terms of moving the refugee agenda away from humanitarian operations towards a more development-oriented focus in line with the nexus approach.

2.4.1 ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The NDPIII includes the refugee response and line ministries sector response plans (SRPs) are introducing a similar approach. This makes the work of creating durable solutions in terms of local integration more holistic with line ministries and DLGs including this important component in planning. There are still challenges such as national level budget allocation to the districts being calculated based on population size which does not include refugee populations leaving RHDs and neighbouring districts with budgets below actual needs on the ground.

The strong policy framework including CRRF, STAI, NDPIII, SRPs as well as the 2006 refugee act and

PDM has form the basis for implementation of the current NURI programme. It is recommended to continue alignment with relevant government policies in a new phase of NURI in support of government commitment to host refugees.

2.4.2 COORDINATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

There are a number of coordination fora at national level in which development partners can participate. The RDE participates in a number of different fora such as CRRF, development partner group and programme working groups. In order to utilise resources in the best possible way, it is important to be strategic when choosing engagement commitments and purpose of engagement.

There is an expressed interest from the Ugandan government side, development partners and implementing partners to support learning and exchange of knowledge across programmes and policies. The RDE would be in a unique position to facilitate this by choosing strategically important focus areas such as best practices to achieving resilience and self-reliance, host/refugee engagement in sustainable natural resource management, promoting green jobs, working with PDM or others.

A new phase of NURI should identify key ambitions at certain strategic engagements as mentioned above and ensure evidence-based data coming from implementing partners feeding into strategic dialogue by the RDE at coordination fora, learning events and advocacy towards government. As stated by several KIs there are many good government policies in place but knowledge of good practices in implementation is lacking. It is a unique opportunity for RDE to identify a few key areas to lead on providing evidence-based learning to share with the wider community. Being specific on areas of strategic engagement would also facilitate strong interlinkage with relevant initiatives such as the agriculture Business initiative (aBi), TradeMark EastAfrica (TMEA), DRDIP, NUSAF4, etc.

2.4.3 COORDINATION AT DISTRICT LEVEL

At district level, coordination of programme activities should be handled by the implementing partners. Partners should be encouraged to take a leading position in working groups when possible. This will give good access to information about other interventions and possibilities for cooperation and facilitation of learning across projects as well as providing a good platform to ensure visibility for Danida and the new phase of NURI.

It is important for the implementing partners to embrace the methodology used in the NURI programme in terms of engagement of DLG, local level government (LLG) and community members in all aspects of project design including identification of needs, prioritisation, planning, implementation, and monitoring. NURI has established an implementation and monitoring committee (IMC) which has proven to be a great asset to the programme. This practice should be continued in a new phase of NURI.

2.4.4 COORDINATION WITHIN IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

A key learning from the current NURI programme is the importance of coordination between implementing partners. NURI CF staff and IPs highlights the importance of coordinating activities across outputs to ensure energies and avoid duplications. In addition, regular meetings enhance understanding of all programme components and facilitates learnings and exchange of experiences. Kick-off workshop and regular meetings between the different implementing partners is important to ensure that project activities benefit target groups in the most optimal way. In addition, regular coordination between implementing partners makes it possible to facilitate learning and to revisit overall objectives of the programmes not to lose sight of overall objective of climate resilience and sustainable self-reliance. With the phasing out of the NURI CF it is important to ensure that the overall

coordination of implementing partners is included in the new operation modality.

Key recommendations

- Ensure alignment with government policies and frameworks.
- RDE should identify key strategic areas for learning, experience sharing and influencing policy agendas at national level. Input for this should come from implementing partners.
- Continue active participation in CRRF, DP group, etc promoting identify key strategic areas for learning, experience sharing and influencing policy agendas at national level (RDE).
- Identify mechanisms for strong coordination of new implementation modality in order to formalise coordination and learning across geographical areas based on experiences from NURI (i.e. IMC meetings).

2.5 STUDY AREA 5: CLIMATE CHANGE

The majority of the population in both host and refugee communities are engaged directly or indirectly in agricultural activities which are increasingly impacted by climate change. The impact of climate change on smallholder agriculture in Northern Uganda is still not entirely clear. For some crops, such as coffee, beans and maize, the growing conditions will become less suitable, but the impact on the local oil crops, sorghum, millet and cassava is, according to most of the models, manageable. However, the uncertainty around some of these projections require that smallholder farmers are taking actions now to make their farms climate smart. Many of them are already doing so, but they need broad support in terms of information and advice to diversify their enterprises and build more resilient farming and cropping systems. They also need access to climate proof varieties, suitable agroforestry and tree species, farm inputs, and finance.⁵

The country's number one priority response to climate change is adaptation in the context of addressing key vulnerabilities in sectors, building adaptive capacity at all levels, addressing loss and damage, and increasing the resilience of communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems.⁶

Without adaptation, climate change, refugee influx, population growth and the biodiversity crisis will destroy the livelihoods of many people. Action needs to be taken to protect and restore nature and ecosystems such as agriculture lands, forests, and wetlands.⁷

The loss of fertile soil and biodiversity, along with the loss of indigenous seeds and knowledge, pose a mortal threat to the future survival of refugee affected areas in Uganda. Without protecting and regenerating the soil on cultivated farmland, pastureland, and forest land, it will be impossible to feed the refugee and host population, keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, or halt the loss of biodiversity.⁸ Climate change and degraded ecosystems trigger and intensify conflicts and fragility, which in turn exacerbates poverty and inequality. It can create a vicious circle. Access to water and land are frequent causes of tension and conflict between communities and between countries. All stakeholders consulted raised this as serious concerns for the future.

Adaptation is the best and cheapest way to prevent and strengthen resilience to climate change, protect biodiversity and create economic opportunities and green jobs. Environmental action and nature-based solutions (NbS) can also reduce greenhouse gas emissions, for example through new and

⁵ Climate risk and vulnerability in Northern Uganda – a rapid desk assessment, commissioned by NURI Danida, March 2022

⁶ Ministry of Water and Environment, Updated National Determined Contribution, September 2022

⁷ East Africa Climate-smart agriculture scoping study: Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. FAO. 2016

⁸ Africa Regenerative Agriculture Study Group Report commissioned by IUCN: Regenerative Agriculture: An opportunity for businesses and society to restore degraded land in Africa. 2021

protected forests absorbing and storing CO².

KIIs with relevant stakeholders have confirmed the impact of climate change especially concerning increased irregularities of rainfall in terms of amount and seasons as well as land degradation. There is a heavy reliance on rain-fed crop production. In order to increase resilience to climate change several areas must be addressed including CSA, weather forecasting, diversification of livelihood within the HH.

The new phase of NURI will have an opportunity to build on the learnings under the current NURI programme in terms of working with CSA. This approach has proven to be very successful, and the NURI CSA model has been adopted by other development interventions such as DRDIP and DINU. Besides from working with CSA, NURI has worked with rural infrastructure (RI) and water resource management (WRM). All three components are important to maintain in a new phase of NURI, which should build on these practices but advisable with a greater emphasis on a farming systems and landscape approach rather than on individual crop production maximalisation.

For improved synergies and deeper impact at community level, it is suggested that rather than working with CSA, RI and WRM, as three separate components, it would be feasible to focus on agriculture production as the primary sector with infrastructure and water as complementary sectors. This approach would ensure a more holistic approach to designing the intervention in a given location, including CSA, agroforestry, rural infrastructure and water and nature resource management. There are several methodologies that can be applied such as farmer systems analysis or regenerative agriculture with opportunities for alignment with International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Global Standards for nature-based solutions (NbS). Consultations with development actors confirmed that working with a holistic approach to climate resilience is the modus operandi when long-term funding is available. It is, however, important to keep in mind that capacities of different key stakeholders such as DLGs and national NGOs vary across the board and local partners might need more support in living up to international standards. A new phase of NURI should incorporate this consideration by ensuring support for capacity development of local actors.

Agroforestry with the intentional combination of agriculture and forestry has multiple benefits, such as greatly enhanced yields from staple food crops, enhanced farmer livelihoods from income generation, increased biodiversity, improved soil structure and health, reduced erosion, and carbon sequestration. NURI has good experiences with working with food forests and other development actors report good results in promoting green livelihood activities for both refugee and host communities through agroforestry. Agroforestry is a host-focused activity since the land is owned by the host community but experience with intercropping options for inclusion of refugees has proven to be a good opportunity to address land issues and promote social cohesion. As previously emphasized it is important to work with an inclusive and participatory approach from the design phase where local research institutions and local farmer knowledge will help identify species including indigenous species with commercial value, resilient and early maturing.

During consultation with key stakeholders one key component that was brought forward was the issue of access to water for production. CSA relies heavily on rain-fed agriculture. Irrigation schemes and other kinds of water for production need to be explored. NURI has worked intensively with WRM and shown great results. Adopting a holistic approach to climate change adaptation would allow for great link between WRM activities and climate resilience in farming systems in terms of ensuring improved water resource management benefits communities participating in a new phase of NURI thereby increasing resilience towards climate shocks such as situations of drought.

NURI has a significant amount of valuable learning from the implementation of the rural infrastructure

component where the use of a resilience design was introduced in 2020 leading to “green roads” that can better cope with heavy rainfall and lead the water off the road and into small-scale irrigation systems. This is a specific learning from the NURI programme. Stakeholders consulted shared similar positive experiences with interventions developed with a focus on climate adaptation and an eye for creation of green jobs.

An increased focus on enhanced and sustainable climate resilience provides an opportunity for a new phase of NURI to adhere to the IUCN Global Standards for NbS and the Rio Marker. There is an opportunity to address the imminent challenges of food security and livelihood of host and refugee communities and through a holistic approach take into account the need to adhere and report according to NbS standards thereby demonstrating how biodiversity and ecosystem services can contribute to addressing the challenges facing target populations.

One major area of concern mentioned by key stakeholders were the environmental impact of tree cutting which has increased due to the high influx of refugees. The demand from refugees for trees for firewood or charcoal production is not limited to refugee affected areas and regions since demand for charcoal comes from many parts of the country. It is understood that the environmental challenge of tree cutting would not stop simply by providing alternative energy sources such as energy saving cooking stoves to refugees since the demand is wider than specific needs of refugee population. This is not to underestimate the importance of introducing alternative energy sources since these have many important impacts but merely to highlight that the issue of charcoal production is a political issue which needs to be addressed at the highest political level.

DLGs and development partners have all been engaged in tree planting and tree growing. For a sustainable impact to occur it is important to link trees to resources important to the local communities in the form of income generation, water source protection or food provision.

Another important point brought forward by multiple stakeholders is the need to collaborate across the board to adapt to the growing threat of climate change. It is important to work with civil society, local communities, private companies and investors to address the growing threat of climate change. Stakeholders engaged in innovative approaches confirmed that there are opportunities where companies and investors have a good business case and where local communities can benefit from adaptation initiatives. Though challenges exist and long-term commitment is required there are opportunities in Uganda to work together and find solutions.

Overall NURI has contributed to increasing production, however, KIIs emphasized that a new phase of NURI should consider livelihoods, sustainable provision of services, management of natural resources and infrastructure development in refugee affected areas. The aim should be to supplement supply-led programming with market driven systems for service delivery. The need for sustainable market driven approaches as part of a comprehensive livelihoods support for refugees and host communities has been well reflected in refugee policies and strategic objectives.

2.5.1 GREENING PROGRAMME INTERVENTION

When engaging in development or humanitarian aid initiatives it is important to bear in mind the potential impact of implementation. There is a need to examine possibilities of reducing emissions in the aid sector and a new phase of NURI should include a focus on this. During discussions with INGOs the issue of green office policy and reduction of emissions was brought up. A number of organisations already have policies in place but often they are not yet implemented. The lack of implementation are often based on limited awareness as well as budget limitations. Some INGOs reported specific donor requirements together with budget lines for reduction of office emissions as having a positive impact on the entire organisations emissions and welcomed this as a best practice in terms of greening aid.

It is recommended that a new phase of NURI takes this opportunity to support INGOs and NGOs in reducing emissions and introducing office policies on limiting waste, etc. In addition, it would be advisable for the embassy to introduce similar initiatives if not already in place.

Key recommendations

- Adopt a holistic approach to climate resilience of smallholder farmers with agriculture as primary sector and water and rural infrastructure as complementary sectors.
- Include environment sector focus through innovative activities for protection and regeneration of soil and biodiversity to support and promote a sustainable, inclusive and green transformation in Uganda inspired by NbS Standards.
- It is recommended to move from supply-led programming to establishment of sustainable market driven systems for service delivery.

2.6 STUDY AREA 6: OPERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Prior to introduction of the CRRF and the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus, most projects targeting refugees in RHDs were humanitarian and short-termed in focus resulting in missed opportunities for sustainability by linking with existing systems and structures. With the progressive CRRF introduced by GoU and with it an increased focus on the HDP nexus, several positive developments are noted by stakeholders. Development-oriented projects are increasing sustainability in interventions based on possibilities of long-term engagements, in-depth analysis of opportunities and barriers and the creation of strategic partnership with private sector actors, research institutes, government entities and CSOs.

Operational sustainability is achieved when results or activities are maintained or even expanded after closure of a programme or project.⁹ While some interventions addressing the HDP nexus by their very nature cannot become fully self-sustainable, it is argued that any project addressing the nexus should consider the mechanisms that potentially could increase the operational sustainability of its interventions. In terms of livelihood, operational sustainability is achieved through a structural change in which the livelihood of target population becomes sustainable by farmers reaching a level in production so as to move to commercialisation and linking to markets driven by private sector actors. In such case sustainability is achieved when there is an incentive for all engaged parties to sustain activities within the value chain.

A new phase of NURI should maintain a focus on farmers and agriculture production with the ambition of supplementing subsistence farming with commercial farming through a targeted intervention, supporting the farmers in linking to market systems while building on existing structures and institutions.

2.6.1 TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

Any work supporting HHs and communities to reach sustainable resilience and self-reliance must meet people where they are based on needs, skills and resources. In order to maintain a focus on both food security and commercial farming it would be helpful to work with segmentation of smallholder farmers. One model is FAOs categorization of subsistence farmers, transition farmers and commercial farmers. Other methods exist and are being used by different development partners. Consultation with stakeholders confirmed that what is most important is to acknowledge the different levels of support, skills and input needed for farmers to move towards self-reliance. Needs and resources of newly

⁹ Increasing the operational sustainability of rural livelihood programmes. Danida Policy brief. July 2022

arrived refugees differ from those of host communities or more settled refugees and as such interventions need to be designed differently. Designing interventions based on this understanding ensures targeted support, clear pathways to progress and increased possibilities for monitoring and adjustment during implementation. In support of this approach, it is feasible to work with a graduation model that looks at supporting farmers to move towards self-reliance and increased resilience by providing a holistic set of services including CSA training, productive assets transfer, VSLA training, family development planning, etc.

NURI operates within poor and vulnerable areas and regions and has worked with farmer groups consisting of both subsistence, transition and commercial farmers. It is considered feasible to continue working with all three categories of farmers in order to support households and entire communities in raising levels of resilience and to ensure a certain level of outreach within the target population. In line with above, it is necessary to understand the capacities and skills of farmers and their current needs. Farmers who have benefitted from NURI interventions might be ready to enter the category of commercial farmers and would need support to link to market systems rather than asset transfer or further skills development, while newly arrived refugees would need skills development, input to start-up and introduction to alternative livelihood if land allocated cannot support food security at HH level.

2.6.2 LINKING TO MARKET SYSTEMS

Many factors impact the opportunities for farmers to link to market systems. It is important to analyse and understand opportunities and barriers in a given context. Consulted stakeholders highlighted issues of road and market infrastructure at the community level. NURI has a number of experiences in this aspect such as green roads and resilience design that supports market linkages and at the same time align with key objectives of climate adaptation and nature-based solutions.

Another challenge highlighted by stakeholders is creating linkages to market actors such as suppliers of agricultural input, buyers of agricultural output and financial institutions. Issues of access to improved seeds, access to finance, information about market prices and access to markets were all brought forward as barriers to sustainable livelihood for farmers.

The Danida Policy Brief on Operational Sustainability highlights that collaboration with other development partners and private enterprises makes it possible to construct highly effective and locally relevant interventions, utilising the unlimited potential of innovative solutions that already exist. During consultations several initiatives in terms of value-chain enhancement and cooperation with private sectors were highlighted by implementing organisations as showing strong results in terms of reaching resilience in a sustainable manner. Financial institutions confirmed an increase in outreach to farmer groups and development of digital products aimed at VSLAs.

2.6.3 BUILDING ON EXISTING STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTION

The NURI programme has had a strong focus on building capacities of existing structures and institutions such as working closely with DLGs and LLGs in all aspects of implementation ensuring that activities is guided by Parish Development Model (PDM).

Government officials consulted in NURI programme areas expressed high appreciation for the support and urged further interventions to continue working according to established Parish Development Plans and Districts Development Plans and to continue the joint monitoring and coordination of efforts.

NURI worked in close collaboration with the regional research centres. These centres have provided excellent point of entry for technology development and dissemination. NURI has supported the promotion of new varieties in West Nile and Acholi, which is highly appreciated by government

stakeholders. Building on the work of existing research centres such as National agriculture research organisation (NARO) supports a wider dissemination of new technologies that may increase resilience and mitigate some of the climate change challenges.

Other important existing structures to build on are the farmer groups and VSLAs included in the NURI programme. It is important to continue building on these and promote them towards climate resilience and self-reliance.

2.6.4 POLICY BRIEF ON OPERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

It is important to acknowledge that refugee-affected areas and regions in Uganda is faced with multidimensional poverty issues. A move towards sustainable durable solutions is influenced by many factors. There is a need for further economic development at regional level to provide opportunities for host and refugee development. It requires a strengthened focus on creating linkages to input and output markets, a more strategic approach to working with farmers as well as a strong monitoring system with clear performance indicators that allows for adjustment and flexibility along the way to reach the objectives of a new phase of NURI. Finally, it is important to continue strengthening linkages to other development initiatives in the region.

The Danida policy brief on operation sustainability captures very precisely the opportunities and challenges in terms of reaching sustainability of interventions. An increased focus on working through market systems linking to private sector actors and financial institutions in order to reach operational sustainability will yield results in terms of sustainability. The conceptual framework provides a solid tool for ensuring that activities are designed through a sustainability lens from the beginning of project design. However, there are trade-offs to be considered when choosing this modality.

Understanding the situation of smallholder farmers and designing project activities accordingly demands more of the project design phase and might also be more costly. Evidence points towards increased sustainability, but it will come at a higher cost per community, which will mean lower target numbers in the project. This can be offset by a stronger focus on partnerships which can help reduce the costs of operations. In addition, there is a need to ensure continued support to subsistence farmers who are not yet ready to transition to commercial farmers. Vulnerable groups such as newly arrived refugees are facing a number of challenges in order to move forward and targeted support for these groups must be included in the project design in order to ensure the desired outreach.

Introducing farmers into market systems does not necessarily mean sustainable resilience is reached. There are many flaws within a market and issues of exploitation need to be considered. In addition, there is the risk that an increased focus on commercial crops might have a negative impact on food security and nutritional needs of the family. Both factors need to be taken into account when risk analysis is made for a project so that mitigation initiatives can be included.

Key recommendations

- Supplement production systems with market driven approach by maintaining focus on farmers and agriculture production and increase commercialisation and market participation of farmers.
- Establish strong partnerships with private sector actors and financial institutions from the design phase.
- Risk analysis need to consider the trade-offs of a market driven approach with mitigating measure identified.

2.7 STUDY AREA 7: IMPLEMENTATION MODALITY

Uganda has a high number of international NGOs operating in the country often with decades-long presence in country and an in-depth knowledge of context, opportunities and challenges. Several INGOs were consulted during the feasibility study and all of them reported high understanding of complexities in refugee affected areas and extensive experience in addressing underlying causes through established methodologies as well as innovative approaches.

There is a large potential to find suitable implementors for a new phase of NURI. All consulted stakeholders had experience in leading large consortiums, and many worked with local partners including NGOs, research institutions and private sector actors. The study team prepared a table for mapping of potential implementing partners with 34 potential partners listed (see annex 7).

Potential partners are identified from information provided by UNHCR and OPM from the livelihood sector working group. The list is not considered exhausted. Information has been entered for two Danish Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs) and two non-Danish international NGOs. Depending on the RDE's approach to the process of identifying implementing partners it is debatable whether it would be relevant to finalise the exercise, since thorough assessment of potential implementation partner would be a requirement during the assessment of received applications. For the assessment, several screening criteria should be developed coming from findings of this feasibility study report. Based on information from key stakeholders at different levels, the study team concludes that there are plenty of relevant partners and that it would be feasible to proceed with an open call for proposals for the wider INGO community in Uganda.

Key recommendations

- It is advisable for the RDE to undertake a facilitated process to identify the most suitable implementation modality, make necessary strategic decisions to guide the process and help establish clear criteria for selection of suitable implementors for a new phase of NURI.

2.8 GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Over the years, the Government of Uganda has taken strides in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in national development planning. The National Gender Policy (2007) provides a framework for addressing gender inequalities and guidance for ensuring that all government policies and programmes in all areas and at all levels are consistent with the long-term goal of eliminating gender inequalities. The Gender Policy stipulates that government ministries and other stakeholders should mainstream gender in their policies, plans, programmes and projects.

The third National Development Plan recognizes that despite the Government's efforts to access credit to farmers, many are still excluded from the economy, including women and youth who form the majority of the household population dependent on subsistence agriculture. Their productivity is largely hampered by low access to arable land, inadequate skills, limited adoption of improved technology, access to extension services and arbitrary land evictions, which further aggravate their land security/tenure rights.¹⁰

The impacts of climate change in Uganda are already being felt as the frequency and intensity of disasters increase. These impacts are, however, not experienced equally across the population. Women face greater risks and carry a heavier burden in relation to their ability to respond and adapt to climate change due to the inequalities they face. Women in Uganda experience gendered structural inequalities across economic, political, environmental, and social systems. Despite this reality, women

¹⁰ East Africa Climate-smart agriculture scoping study: Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. FAO. 2016

are fundamental to Uganda's sustainable development and its response to climate change as key actors. Women account for 77 percent of the agricultural labour force, a sector that contributes 21 percent to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounts for 40 percent of Uganda's export earnings. Ugandan women in agriculture are further constrained due to lacking land rights with women owning only 72,9 percent of that of men.¹¹ With women constituting 77 percent of agricultural labour, empowering women within this sector is likely to lead to increased food security and overall wealth within the nation

Women are also the primary providers of fuel as well as responsible for waste disposal at the household level. Their central role in these three sectors makes them vital actors in supporting climate actions across the country.¹²

2.8.1 GENDER IN NURI

NURI's approach to gender was informed by the guiding principles of the development engagement document (DED). Data from NURI's baseline was general, focusing on households without sex disaggregation. Some aspects were picked up during implementation such as GBV training of Agricultural Extension Workers (AEOs). Some elements of gender were addressed indirectly through selection of family farming systems and CSA technologies and practices, where women as part of the household were expected to participate in decision making. Based on information from key stakeholders it is clear that the household dynamics in these processes were not focused on and due to cultural considerations where males are taken to be the decision makers, it is likely that men made the decisions about the family farming systems, technologies and practices while women did most of the work. NURI has a high involvement of women (62-65%). The NURI 2022 monitoring survey concludes that irrespective of the level of participation, most of the decisions are made by adult male for male headed households. This supports the claim that involvement does not mean empowerment or equality.

Although not intentional for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, NURI introduced discussions on SRHR including family planning at household level, which KIs reported having a positive impact on GBV at HH level. Though the impact of this has not been assessed, this was a good entry point which could be explored further and expanded in the new phase of NURI. Partners reported that integrating family planning into VSLA was a good entry point, but the challenge was getting men involved. Both women and men need to be trained to understand why it is important to consider family planning as an important element in their quest to get out of poverty and why both women and men need to engage in discussions and take action.

In refugee communities, it was pointed out by stakeholders that the provision of cash as an alternative to food rations to refugees encourages men to show up to collect the cash and they end up not using it for the intended purpose. This is seen as a contributing factor to creating conflict at the household level and sometimes ends in violence against women.

2.8.2 MAINSTREAMING GENDER BY OTHER DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

Some of the partners working with both refugees and host communities mentioned that gender is integrated across their programmes. Most partners work with gender only in numbers without doing any gender analysis to inform their actions. The focus is mainly on involvement of women for benefit

¹¹ World Bank Group – Closing the potential-performance divide in Ugandan agriculture, 2018

¹² UNDP (2020) Uganda Gender Analysis – Executive Summary

rather than empowerment. Most partners reported that they do not undertake any gender analysis but respond to the needs as they define them. The limited or lack of sex disaggregated data remains a challenge. This makes it difficult to undertake gender analysis. However, some partners indicated that they are now more aware of this shortcoming and beginning to look at gender beyond numbers. However, they lack the tools to collect sex disaggregated data and the skills to undertake gender analyses.

Discussions with some of the private sector service providers indicated that they have limited understanding of gender issues but do see inequality in handling of finances. One financial institution (FI) noted that in VSLAs women often sits as chairperson while secretary and treasurer posts are occupied by men. It is an issue for women to become treasurer since this is traditionally the man's role. The same FI expressed an interest in addressing this but had no knowledge of how to go about it.

In general, there is a need for capacity development to be able to deliver gender sensitive services. It is necessary to explore household gender dynamics in both refugee and host communities. A focus on women economic empowerment is critical for building agency. It is important that men are involved to understand the benefits to the household to avoid backlash and avoid contributing to more violence against women. Using VSLA and family development plans where both women and men are already focused on common causes seems to be a more suitable entry point for women empowerment initiatives including SRHR, women economic empowerment and addressing GBV. This needs to be undertaken by organisations with capacity in gender equality and women's empowerment.

In this connection, there is a great opportunity for a new phase of NURI to create strong linkages with the Danida-funded UNFPA/CARE Uganda's Women Adolescents and Youth (WAY) rights empowerment programme, which is implemented in a number of NURI districts. Linking information disseminated through VSLAs and farmer groups with access to specialised support at health facilities would reinforce the efforts within the area of SRHR/family planning, gender-based violence (GBV) and women's economic empowerment (WEE).

A qualitative study undertaken by Cecilia Smitt Meyer, with support of the NURI Coordination Function and Arua District Farmers Association (ARUDFA) in March 2022 brought out some important findings that are also corroborated by other studies done in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment, especially relating to agricultural related activities. The key findings from this study were:

1. **Communication:** Access to mobile phone was critical for both women and men farmers. Both genders strongly emphasized that phones make daily life and farming easier by providing the much-needed information on family issues and on farming.
2. **A source of own income** as important for both men and women with both genders emphasizing how this reduces the stress from poverty put on relationships. Both genders stated that own sources of income give greater sense of freedom and money for spending on health-related needs and school fees for children.
3. **Household decision making** - men who had gone through training on GBV and SRHR said they had come to realize the relevance of collective decision making as this pays dividends in farming outcomes and how this had also created less conflict in the relationship.
4. **Strong beliefs about inheritance of land** where responses differed widely with some respondents stating inheritance should be equal as all children should be valued the same while others thought that men should inherit all land and only a small share to be given to women to fall back on of difficulties in marriage and a woman needed to go back to her parents' home.

This study brings out some of the challenges also mentioned during consultations with different stakeholders interacted with during the fieldwork of this feasibility study.

Key recommendations

- Mainstream gender throughout the project based on initial gender analysis.
- Ensure capacities and budget for gender sensitive work and services at all levels.
- Ensure strong linkages between a new phase of NURI and the WAY project to maximize efforts of SRHR, GBV and WEE.

3 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustaining Uganda’s open-door asylum policy and progressive development-oriented model presents a challenge, requiring additional international support. The unprecedented surge in refugee numbers and the protracted stay of refugees in Uganda is imposing excessive pressure on overstretched state and host community resources. At present, there are close to 1,5 million refugees in Uganda, a sharp increase from approximately 430,000 in 2016. This has placed environmental pressure on the limited and fragmented land, and eroded productivity, while at the same time there are missed opportunities for refugees to acquire skills and resources needed for sustainable livelihoods in Uganda and when they return. The 12 RHDs in Uganda carries the brunt of the burden and host and refugee communities in RHDs face serious challenges of poverty and food insecurity based on the high influx of refugees. In addition to struggling with influx of refugees the impacts of climate change are also felt on RHDs as in other parts of the country. Prolonged periods of drought, irregular rain patterns and extensive periods of heat are some of the key changes in weather patterns informed by KIs.

Humanitarian appeals are chronically and severely underfunded, further compounding risks and vulnerabilities of refugees, as well as pressures on domestic resources. Refugees and host communities are susceptible to underlying poverty and vulnerabilities exacerbated by limited basic social services delivery, poor infrastructure, and limited market opportunities. The magnitude and challenges of the refugee situation call for a multifaceted comprehensive refugee response using a holistic approach to strengthen prevention, address root causes, provide protection and pursue lasting solutions.

With a long-term focus targeting refugees and their hosts, CRRF has the potential to boost the general development for Uganda’s refugee hosting districts while shifting the refugee response paradigm from one of care and maintenance to self-reliance and resilience. GoU policy framework has developed in support of the CRRF with NDPIII and SRPs integration refugee response and durable solutions in policies and plans.

As for the issue of climate change, there is a very clear need for options that can help smallholder farmers adapt to climate change to retain jobs and food production in the future. A failure to invest in small-scale agriculture will lead to a slow but steady decrease in production, with devastating effects on local and regional food systems and national economies more widely. Conversely, investing in climate resilience has the potential to create multiple economic, social and environmental benefits, with multistakeholder partnerships emerging as a clear option to increase investments.

The Natural Resources, Environment, Climate Change, Land and Water Management Programme of the NDP III, underlines the importance of natural resources, environment, climate change, water and land management as critical to reducing effects of climate change, achieving increased household

incomes, and improving the quality of life of the population.

Government policies regarding refugee response as well as addressing climate change corresponds well to Denmark's strategy for development cooperation "The world we share" as well as the USF 2023-27 in which the government of Denmark accepts its responsibility in supporting Uganda as a refugee hosting country highlighting the importance of meeting international responsibility of fighting poverty and inequality for people in fragile countries and regions of origin and advocates an increased focus on addressing climate change.

At policy level there is a strong alignment while on the ground the NURI programme has further contributed to consolidating the long-term engagement of Danida and cooperation with the government of Uganda in providing durable solutions to the challenges of refugee-affected areas with an eye on climate change adaptation.

NURI has led to extensive knowledge of the context and valuable experiences and learnings addressing root causes of poverty and food insecurity in the Northern regions. It is deemed highly feasible for RDE to continue an engagement with refugee-affected areas and regions building on learnings from NURI. In the development of a new phase of NURI a number of recommendations should be taken into account.

- Annex 1: Terms of reference**
- Annex 2: Mission preparation note**
- Annex 3: Study framework**
- Annex 4: Report on stakeholder consultations**
- Annex 5: List of stakeholders**
- Annex 6: Interview guides**
- Annex 7: Mapping of potential implementing partners**
- Annex 8: Technical Brief - Refugees**