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SOME OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN RESETTLING DISPLACED RURAL PEOPLE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

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Abstract

Human migration is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century especially so in Africa. Millions of people are living in camps supposedly temporarily but which in some cases have been in existence for decades. This paper describes the attempts to return IDPs to the land where they can resume a more normal life in mainstream society.

More than 1.8 Million Internally Displaced People (IDPs) were forced to flee their homes and live in squalid displacement camps or dehumanizing “protected villages”, due to the conflict in northern Uganda, close to the Sudanese border. This began over 20 years ago, in a struggle between the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan army which caused widespread insecurity and humanitarian crises, including the abduction of children, who were forced to fight in the war. This has left both children and adults in a desperate situation in both Northern Uganda and neighbouring Countries.

The IDPs of Lamwo District scratched a living from nearby forests, yet were largely supported by the World Food Programme (WFP). A dependency culture set in, exacerbated by the years of violent upheaval, deprivation and low consciousness of rights. The project described in this paper is an attempt to put the returnees on the path towards sustainable use of the land and exposure to markets so that they may once again achieve stable livelihoods.

The work was implemented at the Agoro International Vocational Institute (AIVI) where 12 ha of land was provided by the community to set up a training centre.

Key words: Uganda, displaced, training, livelihoods

Introduction

In June 2008 two Ugandan Ministers and other senior officials approached the British Consultancy & Charitable Trust (BCCT) for training support to ‘returnees’ in the Kitgum and Lamwo Districts in Northern Uganda. The request was for assistance in developing sustainable livelihoods commencing with agriculture and better quality housing, and to deliver the peace dividend to the community as soon as possible.

The Government feared unrest in the camps following the phasing out of food aid and from January 2009 ordered IDPs to return to their home villages, which had been destroyed. As a result trees were

slashed to clear land for food, build houses, and provide fuel wood for cooking and for fuel for brick kilns – a very destructive practice.

The IDPs have few skills to achieve sustainable livelihoods and without support no more than subsistence may be achieved. Therefore the project's aim was to establish a vocational training institute to equip them with the necessary technical, organizational and financial skills to take practical action to improve their situation and to know and be able to exercise their rights.

Thus engagement and involvement with the community has been a key element from the start, collaborating with the clan elders and their parliamentary system, as a foundation to build better capacity and sustainable livelihoods.

Agoro International Vocational Institute (AIVI) was established to demonstrate sustainable model conservation agriculture (CA) and associated building enterprises. The ultimate goal was the establishment of food security through the organised sale of food products with the resulting incomes creating a demand for supportive building works and thus nurturing a local economy.

AIVI is located 5 km south of Agoro village not more than 15km from the Sudanese border and is 70 km north of the District headquarters at Kitgum. The people belong to the Acholi tribe and being almost 500 km north of the capital Kampala even before the war development in the area was somewhat neglected due to its remote setting

Technical Training

The AIVI land was part cleared in the dry season of 2008/9 and demarcated so that 4 ha was allocated to 6 tenants, some demonstration plots were established and a number of dry stone wall buildings erected all built under supervision by local people.

On the land each enterprise was focused on a particular technology. A key characteristic of these technologies was that they were designed to tackle a real and in most cases an urgent problem that farmers were facing, or to enable farmers to make more efficient or productive use of their existing resources. Five of the six enterprises/practices focused on crops that were experiencing severely reduced production levels and failures due to disease or unsuitable varieties.

Some technologies were relatively simple; for example, the replacement of a variety of cassava or beans with one or more new varieties that are resistant to disease. Others were more complex such as the introduction of hand dug beds for vegetable production (single and double dug).

The conservation aspect is especially important including the benefits of introducing organic matter (OM) into the soil.

In addition, sunflowers plus beekeeping introduced changes in farm and enterprise management, which offered farmers a better and more secure financial return.

Farmer groups provided the structure for project activities, including training, multiplication of planting material and provision of credit.

AIVI encouraged farmers to form new groups: others worked with existing groups, in the form of tenant farmers, old and new. The existing tenant farmers group already had a level of identity and solidarity, and although the morale and commitment of some were in question, they provided a readymade body in which new technology could be introduced.

Demonstrations of new crop varieties were set up on farmer's land. Although scientists and extension officers provided technical advice, the staff and farmers themselves jointly managed the demonstrations and trials. This helped the farmers to learn and provide credibility to the technology in the eyes of other farmers who saw the success of the crops through the growing season.

Most of the enterprises were covered using Farmer Field Schools (FFS) as a forum for experimenting with new technology and for training. Farmers who agreed to be the project tenant farmers met regularly during the cropping season so learning by doing and observing and analyzing progress.

Even when FFS were not used, experimentation was an important part of various enterprises and practices. Farmers learned much from trials of different methods and observation and discussion of results.

Farmers visited areas where technology has already been adopted and integrated into local farming systems. Such visits are time consuming and expensive to arrange, but highly popular and rewarding.

Equally important, the project's training of trainers was a deliberate strategy to increase the impact and sustainability of technologies by making sure there are people within the local community who can extend the training more widely than the project partners could deliver to their own staff and who will be a continuing source of expertise and advice to other farmers when outside assistance ends. This worked particularly well where there was already a structure in place. For example the cassava enterprise used the 'Extension Link Farmers' within the district farmers association.

Nonetheless, the training of trainers gave people privileged access to resources which sometimes created ill-feeling. Some participants in the sunflowers/honey enterprise felt that the trainers had an unfair advantage because they had been given equipment and protective clothing for collecting honey, which meant they could charge other farmers a fee for their use. This was resolved when AIVI teamed with the local 'Women and Bees' organisation.

Demonstrations were established on farmer fields which has the advantage that other farmers can see the technology in an environment similar to their own farms. The project has used demonstration plots as sites to hold field days when large numbers of people from the surrounding area are invited to visit and question the technology.

Seed loans were given to farmers who struggle to afford seed purchase especially of new varieties. These loans were in kind not cash and farmers were given seeds on the understanding that twice the loaned amount of seed would be returned to the project after harvest. This was not only to assist the initial participants to use improved seed but to make sure an increasing amount of seed became available for loans to other tenant farmers and groups.

Awareness was raised through public and Clan Elder meetings, which were organized through AIVI and other Community Based Organizations (CBO) and Wildlife Foundations. This community awareness was an important part of the mobilization of participants.

Communities had to be willing to contribute some of the resources needed to implement a development initiative. The contributions could be in cash, labour or materials, e.g. wood for making bee hives.

Wider dissemination has come through extension meetings, which led to groups outside the project area taking up the new practices and a field day and exhibition was held which was attended by over 300 people, including local and international dignitaries.

Partnerships

CBO, NGO, government and commercial bodies have collaborated in the project. BCCT and the community based organization were the main implementers on the ground. Following short term visits by volunteers in 2008/9 an MSc student from the Royal Agricultural College Cirencester, U.K was based at Agoro for a year to assist development. The AIVI project manager mobilized people for training and supervised the budget and project operations. Partners involved at local level included Sub-County and District leaders, and central government's Ministries of Agriculture (MoA) and Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF).

Enterprises

The main crops planted during the 2009/10 seasons have been maize, beans, cassava, okra, sunflower/bees, onions and sweet potatoes. A brief description of some of these enterprises follows:

Cassava

New varieties of cassava, which are resistant to a disease that has seriously affected production over large parts of the country, were introduced. Yields increased and households earn extra income from their surplus production. Collaboration between the district farmers association, research scientists and local government has been crucial to this crop's success and local community's livelihoods.

Cassava mosaic virus is spread by a particular kind of whitefly and has existed in Uganda and neighbouring countries for many years. In the late 1980's, a new form of the virus spread throughout north, central and eastern Uganda and dealt a severe blow to households who use cassava both as a staple food crop and as a source of income. People were hungry and income levels were declining.

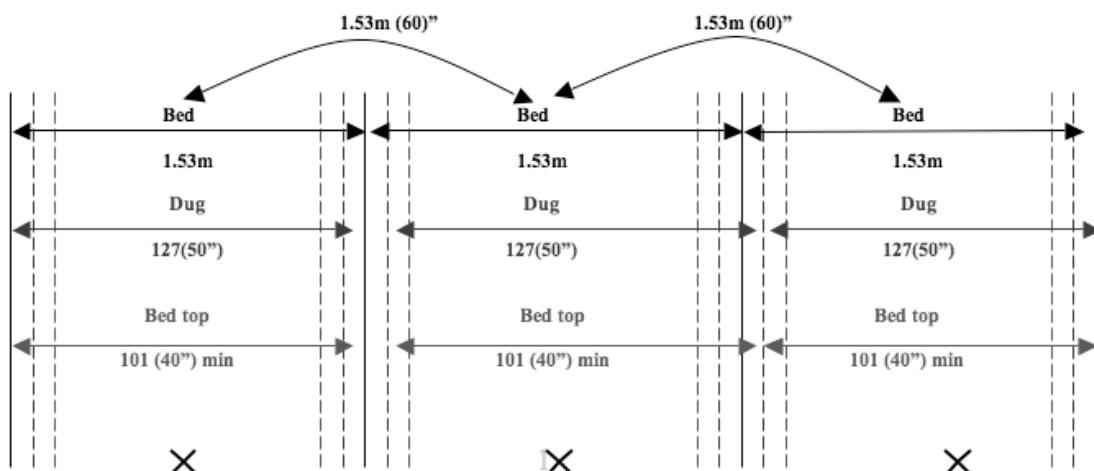
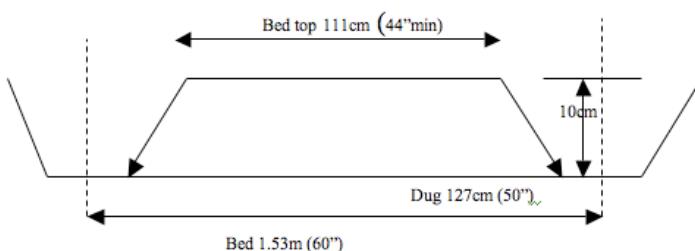
Tenant farmers replaced the old, disease affected cassava varieties with new ones that are both higher yielding and resistant to mosaic virus. This required collecting stems of the new variety, planting them on AIVI multiplication plots within the Agoro sub-county and distributing the new stems to farmers, in a way that would be sustainable after each harvest.

Hand Dug beds – Onions and Okra

The benefits of a ‘double dug’ open bed system include:

- Consistent cultivation and a systematic approach to improved soil nutrition and structure at every rotation
- Removal of compaction and soil pans leading to better root growth and therefore drought resistance and crop health
- Optimization of the land available for crops

Highly appropriate for un-cultivated land; double digging turns the soil to a depth of 50-60cm and animal manure and other organic matter (OM) is mixed into the subsoil. AIVI constructed 22 ‘double dug’ open beds as a demonstration.

**Double bed formations****BED PROFILE****Bed profile****Sweet Potatoes**

New sweet potato varieties have improved nutrition and incomes for 300 households in Lamwo District. In Agoro families are growing and eating sweet potatoes with more vitamins and local women have set up successful businesses to make and sell food products. What was once a subsistence crop will now be grown as an income generator and has the potential to become a lucrative commercial enterprise.

Farmers in Agoro have grown local varieties of sweet potato for many years, and they are a staple part of the diet for many families. Researchers in Kenya and other countries have recently developed new varieties with higher levels of Vitamin A and with higher potential yields than local varieties.

AIWI has taken the first steps to promoting the planting of these new varieties and encouraging families to use them. This meant finding a way to make planting material available that is free from diseases and adapted to local conditions. Provision of new varieties is not sufficient to ensure farmers grow them or use them in their meals and feed their children, without a considerable input of training and education.

Primarily the material provided is a new variety of a crop that farmers already grow: they substitute the new variety or add the new variety to the range of varieties already on the farm. The project began with a new variety, which has high levels of Vitamin A and is early maturing. Seventeen new varieties can be grown in rapid multiplication sites in the sub-county and at other satellites, but the project is still accessing the planting material. Multiplying the materials locally means that they are adapted to local conditions and do not have to be transported long distances. Farmers can see them growing locally, see how they perform and learn from the way in which the multiplication farmers are looking after their crop. However, maintaining these sites free of disease requires a high level of skill, which demands further training.

Sunflower/Beekeeping

Farmers in various villages of Lamwo and Karamojo Districts have successfully raised their incomes and improved their food security through the combined benefits of sunflower production and beekeeping. They are using their new skills and knowledge to help other communities establish the same enterprises. Key to the success of this enterprise has been partnership between organizations with different and complementary skills.

Lamwo and Karamojo Districts are semi arid areas. Rainfall is low and erratic; rain usually falls within a short period followed by a long dry season. Average farm sizes range from 2.5 to 7 acres in different parts of the district, both food deficit districts with poor nutrition and low farm incomes. There are no major cash crops grown in the district, though cotton and tobacco are grown on small-scale contracts.

The natural vegetation is scattered shrubs and trees mainly of drought tolerant acacia species. These are excellent sources of food for bees, which makes Lamwo and Karamojo high potential areas for beekeeping and honey production, but the biodiversity needs to be expanded. Earlier projects had introduced new hives to the area so there was already some degree of awareness and some farmers who had training in management of bees and extraction of honey. AIWI now uses improved beekeeping technology from two organizations: 'Women and Bees' and Agoro Community Development Association (ACDA) in various villages of the district, as a means to improve food security and increase household income.

The two main parts of the "package" introduced by the districts fit together to give a better outcome than either would on their own. Sunflowers produce a crop within three months, so it meets resource poor farmer needs for a quick return on their investment of labour and the money spent on seeds. This return comes from the oil, which they use in the home (saving money which

they would otherwise have to spend buying oil) and then sell any surplus locally to other households and hotels, and in the nearest town, Kitgum.

To extract the oil, the sunflower is taken to a Mission, in Kitgum, where a small percentage of the oil is retained by the nuns as payment for this service which they sell to raise funds to maintain the oil press facility.

Improved design of beehives, better management of the hives and improved skills in extracting honey provide increased income. By combining the sunflowers with beekeeping the bees have an additional source of nectar and so produce more honey while the bees pollinate the sunflowers. An additional product of the sunflowers is the residue following oil extraction which is a protein-rich source of food and when fed to animals improves health and increases production of milk and meat.

An added environmental benefit is that beekeepers are keen to protect trees in the area because they are a source of food for the bees. Trees that would otherwise have been cut for charcoal, for which there is a huge market, have a better chance of being preserved. This has a positive effect on soil and water conservation; erosion and runoff being major problems in the district.

Lessons Learned

- Relying on farmers as trainers has both strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand it reduces costs and means that the project can train many more farmers. It also ensures that when outside partnership ends, the expertise to continue training remains in the community. On the other hand, inexperienced trainers need continued support, not only in responding to technical questions but also in developing their confidence and competence in training.
- Working with groups has enabled the projects to achieve greater impact. The ability to reach more potential beneficiaries; more importantly, it has enhanced the quality of training and business support due to the bonds of group solidarity, mutual encouragement and reinforcement of knowledge that a group setting provides, hence more interest and attraction of prospective funders.
- There is already a local market chain for honey to the Sudan. It is sold locally in the market trading centres. AIVI plan to support this process by buying from tenant and local farmers to process and sell across the Sudanese border, as a Group Initiative for a fair price and to provide small-scale farmers greater market access.

Future Development

- Future plans are to support the current six tenant farmers and six new tenant farmers on the AIVI land, and to include other farmer groups in the short term, with the aim for them all to produce high quality seed for the local market and their families. This will reduce costs to farmers adopting the new varieties and also generate local income, providing a boost to the economy.
- Groups who are interested in setting up processing and production enterprises require training in entrepreneurship, business and financial management. This involves not only initial training but also on-going business advice. The 'Strategic Approach to Farming Success' short course in farm business management developed at the University of the

Free State in RSA and which was launched at the 15th IFMA conference in Brazil provides a suitable proforma for farm business training and it is hoped to introduce an adapted version into East Africa through existing institutions e.g. Gulu University.

Impact

- Success can be measured in more than produce sold, be it seeds, vegetables, honey and oil or cash earned. Farmers who have learned new skills and built up new enterprises, feel a real sense of achievement and empowerment that is a valuable legacy of the project and Institute, feeding into other development initiatives in the area. Others point to the improved quality of life they and their children now experience.
- **Cash income** – in the enterprises, farmers talk about their increased income. Rather than talk about the money itself, most emphasised the benefits that it allows: paying for children's education, clothing their families properly, paying medical expenses, or investing in new on and off-farm enterprises.
- **Food security** – particularly for the enterprises which focus on staple crops (maize, beans, cassava, sweet potato), many farmers say that their own food supplies are more secure than before; they and their families are eating more and have healthier diets.
- **Less vulnerability** – this is partly a question of money and food security, but is seen also in stronger social ties and linkages to more networks and sources of advice and information that farmers experience through their involvement with the project.
- **Self-respect** – the benefit that comes across most strongly from listening to participants is their sense of achievement, self-respect and increased self-confidence. These benefits are often missed in formal evaluations of development projects but are nonetheless very real to people who have felt excluded and marginalized because of their poverty. For some, this change comes from moving their farming onto a more income generated or business footing. For others, it comes from being able to look after the financial needs of their families without constantly having to fall back on help from better-off neighbours or relatives.

Possible Links

During 2010, AIVI has been in discussion with the Northern Farmers Cooperative Initiative (NUFCI) to explore mutual benefits of bulk storage and added value through simple processing of crops. NUFCI have leased over 20 ex tobacco warehouse facilities across Northern Uganda which may be used for this purpose. AIVI is also collaborating with the Northern Uganda Youth Development Centre (NUYDC) for further expansion of their programme which will include the much needed introduction of livestock.

Considerable finance will be required for all these initiatives and a project proposal has been submitted to Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) by BCCT in collaboration with AIVI. It is hoped the project will be included in a DFID funding package which is being initiated for the deprived people of Northern Uganda and in particular the youth, who are the key to the successful recovery of the Acholi people from their years of trauma.

Conclusion

AIVI has demonstrated that with limited funds, the good will of volunteers and committed individuals and the motivation and participation of the local population, spectacular progress can be achieved. A building block has been put in place and even should future external funding be limited a lasting legacy has been established.

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