



COMMONGROUND PROJECT NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 2 SEPT 2023



WORD FROM CHIEF OF PARTY

Since July the CommonGround project has transitioned from inception to full implementation. An official launch event for the CommonGround and BRIGHT projects were held in Fort Portal with the aim of introducing the projects to the public but also to create awareness among all stakeholders involved in water resources, environment management and farming systems, including government entities, district local government, donors, researchers, NGO partners and the local community.

The Elgon region was incorporated into the CommonGround project from beginning of July and has started operating in Bududa district, initially targeting 13 sub counties of Bukalasi, Bundesi, Bubita, Bumayoka, Buwali, Bufuma, Mabono, Bushiyi, Busiriwa, Bumwalukani, Nakatsi, Bunabutiti and Bushika. The identification of these sub counties was informed by the work done by the predecessor MWARES project. The project will scale to other sub counties in the coming years and eventually reach 50,000 farming households. The total number of households targeted by CommonGround now stands at 150,000 divided between the three regions.

Kigezi and Rwenzori regions embarked on training of farmer innovators and their spouses/partners in all the 24 project communities. Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) were signed with the local government of Bunyangabu and Ntoroko districts.

The close collaboration with the BRIGHT project continued with several meetings to harmonize areas of operations and to share experiences on the implementation of the PIP approach. CommonGround also supported the BRIGHT project with trainers in PIP. An inception phase reflection workshop took place in Fort Portal and nearby communities over several days, with representation by the donor and sister projects. The outcome was positive with suggestions focused on accelerated and increased investments in the target communities

COMMONGROUND PROJECT LAUNCH



The CommonGround project (CG) is a four-year project being implemented by Integrated Seed and Sector Development (ISSD) Uganda in partnership with Wageningen Environment Research (WENR) and local partners JESE, AID, Caritas and A2N Uganda with funding from the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Kampala.

The project's goal is to build 150,000 resilient farmer communities and watersheds in the highlands of Uganda (Kigezi, Rwenzori, and Elgon) which are under growing degradation threats due to the high population pressure, based on sustainable farming systems, restored watersheds, and improved marketing opportunities.

The project is grounded on 3 pathways that are aimed at contributing to improved financial wellbeing and food availability for 150,000 smallholder farmer households. The initial stages

started with recruitment of staff and on 1st February staff started with induction among other activities.

After, studies were conducted to enable the staff to make realistic work plans and budgets. These included gender study, a farming systems study, a baseline survey, and a market access study among others. There was also involvement of government officials and local leaders in planning and decision making from day one.

Hence before kickstarting the official implementation, it was paramount that the project organises for the official launch such that we introduce it to the public. The aim of the Launch was to create wide scale awareness about the CG Project among all stakeholders involved in water resources, environment management and farming systems including government entities, district local government, researchers, NGO partners and the local community. Discussions between CommonGround and BRIGHT projects top management teams were held, and it was agreed that we organize a joint launch.

This would also demonstrate the much-desired collaboration between the two projects funded by EKN. Following the confirmation of the date by both ISSD/WENR and IFDC, a series of joint preparatory meetings took place. Committees were formulated, budgets developed, and service providers identified. Venue for the joint launch was confirmed and Guest invitations sent out by both CG and BRIGHT project organisers. The participants at the launch involved EKN Representatives, MAAIF, MWE, Chief Administration Officers from the 6 districts of operation, the District Production Officers, District Natural Resource Officers, all the local partner organisations, EKN funded projects, Journalists, CommonGround and BRIGHT staff among others.



Hans Raadschilders signing on the launch board



Day of the launch

After all preparations were done, officially, on 16th August 2023 in Fort Portal City at Nyaika Hotel, the joint project's launch was held. It all started in the afternoon with guests making their way to the venue and registering their participation. After registration, the guests, CommonGround staff, IFDC staff were ushered to the meal serving places for lunch. After lunch, all guests were ushered to the main venue for the official launch. The launch started with a word of prayer, and anthems.

After the prayers, Principal Assistant Secretary Rubanda district opened with remarks on behalf of all Local Government. He explained how the Local Government is Implementing CG/BRIGHT Projects. He said that as local governments, they are committed to ensuring that the projects are successful by incorporating them in their work plans. He clarified the roles of the local governments in implementing the two projects as expected in the MOUs. IFDC Country Director Samuel Ssempala said that the two projects embody the values of empowerment, resilience, and inclusive growth. He revealed that BRIGHT is not merely a project; it is a promise of positive change for more than 100,000 highland farm households in Uganda.

In his remarks, Flemming Nielsen the Chief of Party for the CommonGround Project said that the project is for four-years (2022-2026) and it aims at building 150, 000 resilient farmer communities and watersheds in the highlands of Uganda based on sustainable farming systems, restored watersheds, and improved marketing opportunities. He appreciated the Embassy EKN who are the funders and emphasized that Wageningen Environment Research (WENR) and ISSD Uganda in partnership with local partners are committed to seeing that the project is a success.

Flemming said the CommonGround and BRIGHT project partnership is a great opportunity to share ideas and lessons which will lead to the success of both projects. Grace Babirye, the acting Team Lead for IFDC-BRIGHT project explained that Building Resilience and Inclusive Growth of Highland farming systems for rural Transformation (BRIGHT) is a four-year initiative (2022-2026) that aims to build resilience of 106, 500 highland farm households in Uganda to economic and climate-related shocks.

She revealed that like CommonGround, BRIGHT is also funded by the Embassy of the EKN but being implemented in partnership with Agriterra, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries (MAAIF), the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO),

district local governments, and private sector partners. In her speech, Lucy Lyango, the Acting Commissioner for Wetland Management, who also represented the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Water and Environment Alfred Okidi said globally, rural livelihoods are increasingly challenged by the dual threats of land degradation and climate change.

She revealed that she was happy to know that the two projects aim at empowering and motivating communities to invest in improving their living conditions and natural environment and in working collectively towards more resilient farms, communities, and watersheds. "For almost 10 years, EKN has supported the Ministry of Water and Environment and I thank them for their unending support," Lyango said. Hans Raadschilders, who represented EKN said the Embassy has supported projects in Uganda for more than 10 years which he believes have transformed communities.

According to Hans, for all the projects, they are learning a lot to improve, hence they have improved food security programs. "It requires courage to improve and sustain these projects. I am excited to see that two of the EKN funded projects work together," he said. Consolata Acayo, the commissioner for communication at the Ministry of Agriculture who represented the Chief Guest state minister for agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, said that many projects come in and the other stops, she was however happy to see that two projects were committing to work together which is a beautiful thing to be emulated by other organizations doing almost similar interventions. According to Acayo, as a ministry, they have a mission and vision which is to transform subsistence farming into commercial farming.

"As a sector, we have come up with six strategic areas: Issues of seeds, issues of pests, diseases and vector control and mechanization and irrigation among others," she revealed. After the speeches officially the CommonGround and BRIGHT projects were officially launched with the cutting of a ribbon on the boards that had the message committing to transforming the lives of the rural communities.

Then all invited guests signed on the launch boards as a sign of their commitments but also as witnesses on the launch. After the signing, the chief guest, EKN and other guests cut the cake which was served to all the invited guests CommonGround/BRIGHT staff. Then there were interactions and then departure of guests. In the evening, after the launch, there was a team building, interaction, and buffet for both CommonGround, ISSD Kampala team, WENR, EKN and BRIGHT staff.

REFLECTION OF THE INCEPTION PHASE OF THE PROJECT



The Team from EKN, ISSD Uganda , WENR and CG during the Embassy Visit in Nyambigha Community in Ntoroko District

On 14th of August, the CG team prepared for the Reflection Of The Inception Phase Of The Project. Internally there were presentations of the progress of CG project to both ISSD and WENR teams at Fort Breeze hotel with focus on the inception phase.

Participants included CommonGround; Project staff (36), the ISSD Uganda staff from Kampala (07), the WENR staff (03) and later, in the afternoon, two EKN representatives joined. During the reflection meeting that was held at Fort Breeze hotel in Fort Portal City, many issues were discussed.

These included reflecting on what has so far transpired from the inception phase and what next for the 1st phase EKN specifically explained their expectations, highlighting some of the issues to be addressed in the inception report such as review and testing the assumptions stated in the project proposal, drawing lessons from the current implementation, further refinement of the Results

Framework and Log frame, documenting the implementation strategies (investment strategies per pathway) and reviewing the budget among others.

After, on 15th August, the team from ISSD Kampala office, EKN, WENR and CG staff visited the field in Ntoroko in Musandama 1 village in Nombe sub county Ntoroko district to meet communities and discuss what had transpired during the initial project phase.

Over 81 community members were present during the visit. The community started with the brief introduction of their village by the area leadership and later made presentations of their current situation and future vision maps. The first map presented was about the current situation and the second map was about their desired situation. Afterwards, they also presented their work plans. After the presentation, there was a question-and-answer session.





EKN Team took a group Photo with Musandama Community during the Embassy Visit



Josephat Byaruhanga from EKN discussing with CG staff during the Inception Meeting

In the afternoon, the team departed for Ntoroko district local government where they had a meeting with the district local leadership. Present in the meeting was the District Environmental Officer Herbert Kamuhanda, the RDC RTD Maj. Mugabirwe Edward, Deputy CAO Wan Busobozi and Eddy Kabugho the vice Chairperson LCV.

In the discussion, the district officials were grateful for the CommonGround Project, and the activities so far implemented. The Vice LC5 chairperson who represents Karugutu sub-county highlighted the challenges they are faced as a district especially in the highland areas.

She confirmed that there have been various engagements in the district within natural resources because the district is prone to floods, the soil has been degraded and trees cut down. The RDC highlighted the major challenges the district is grappling with including poor road networks which are impassable in many of the areas including the road from the fishing site. "People would like to access fish but the cost of transporting it is high, making it unaffordable for the locals. All this is because of the meager resource envelope "he said.

He emphasized that the district has well qualified staff around natural resources but many times they are not able to do their work because of limited funding. According to RTD Maj. Mugabirwe, there various government programmes including Parish Development Model (PDM) which the CommonGround project fits in and he encouraged communities under the project intervention be encouraged to take part.

He was grateful to the funders and implementers of the CommonGround project for the support to Ntoroko communities and pledged support during implementation of the project. Afterwards, the team also visited Nyambigha village in Karugutu sub-county Ntoroko district. The community presented their vision plans (The current and the desired) and after also shared their action plans.

After the presentation, the visiting team had discussions and after they traveled back to CommonGround Project head office in Fort Portal for lunch. After there was interaction between the CG staff, WENR and EKN staff on what transpired from the field visit and from the reflection meeting that happened in Fort



KIGEZI NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

Training of PIP innovators Kigezi region embarked on training of farmer innovators. In this respect, the first three training sessions were conducted focusing on: raising awareness about household problems and solutions, discussing the family tree, and discussing the PIP approach. These training sessions targeted farmer innovators and their spouses/ partners in all the 12 project communities.

Also, there was awareness raising about problems and solutions (First Training Session). In the sessions, there was identification of household level problems and solutions which were understood to be the first step to dealing with the bottlenecks that constrain development.

In this session, PIP, innovators and their partners (spouses or other family member) first identified all the social, economic, and environmental problems they encounter in their homes. They later, through group discussions identified their causes, effects, and solutions. Also critical for session 1 was creating awareness about the different problems that occur on the hill tops and slopes and how they also affect activities taking place at the downstream and how they can be addressed.

Discussion of the family tree (Second Training Session)

The second training session was planned for the PIP innovator and partners to understand the family tree, how it is done, and its relevance in solving some household challenges. Using the family tree, gender- based roles and responsibilities were discussed looking at the paid and non-paid work done by the man and the woman, work done by the man and woman together, and this increased dialogue among the participants looking at the activities that take place and the family expenses made, thus more awareness and appreciation about each other's role in the family. Participants appreciated the desire to have a more

balanced tree where the husband, wife and children have more shared work than one person carrying most of the burden, as well as checking unnecessary expenditure that does not benefit the entire household.

Explanation of PIP approach (Training Session 3)

The major activity of training session three was to discuss the PIP approach especially for the new participants who did not attend the awareness meetings. This was yet another opportunity for PIs to understand fully the PIP principles and how they are applied. In this session, PIP principles were explained using the image box to bring out the different ways the principles can be applied. Through group discussions, participants discussed more examples of PIP principles in practice as well as identifying local words that could be used to refer to the PIP principles.

Overall, a total of 550 participants were reached, representing 92% of the expected 600 participants in the 12 target communities. 565 (Males 236, female 310 and youths 19) people participated in the first training session; 573 (Males 252, females 309 and youths 22) participants in training session 2, and 512 (males 210, females 253 and youths 49) participants in the 3rd training session.





PROFILING THE PROJECT AREA IN KIGEZI AND RWENZORI BEFORE OFFICIAL IMPLEMENTATION

After the inception phase of the CommonGround Project, it was important to profile the official project intervention area. The aim of the profiling was to give us the current state before the project starts official interventions and this data is what will be used for future reference or as a comparison of after the four years of project implementation.

The data is also aimed at helping the implementers to assess the impact after the project implantation. In the end of July to early August, the communication Officer with a professional video journalist started the profiling of the villages. This involved capturing videos, pictures, and short stories of the state of communities, the state of household, the degraded hotspots, and the extent to which they have been degraded, the mindset of the people through interviews among others.

Profiling also included having discussions with the local communities, the farming communities, the local leadership, the district leadership, opinion leaders, extension workers among others. The Profiling was done by the Communications Officer (Taking pictures and noting the interviews) and was supported by one video journalist (Shooting the videos and he is supporting with editing). We did write info, good photographic interpretation, and videos but also audio for future reference.

Two villages were profiled (four per sub county) and six district bringing the total to 30 villages in both Kigezi and Rwenzori The selection was guided by both the regional coordinators and field supervisors who also allocated field officers of specific villages to take me to the respective areas of profiling.

The interviews involved two households for the newly verified PIs per village representing the rest, the LCI and then the sub county officials since the district was not easy to catch up with during the time of profiling. The profiling was done Rwenzori (Ntoroko and Bunyangabu districts) and Kigezi (Kabale, Kisoro and Rubanda districts).

COMMUNITIES IN RWENZORI & KIGEZI START OPENING ROADS



Communities in the Rwenzori and Kigezi region have started opening community roads to mitigate the challenges of lack of roads. This was after the communities had a series of awareness meetings during the CommonGround Project awareness meetings in the communities. Through the project, communities were introduced to the participatory Integrated Planning (PIP) approach which is effective in increasing motivation, resilience, and stewardship but also works under three guiding principles: empowerment, integration, and collaboration.

In the meetings, many issues were emphasized including social, economic, and environmental problems, their causes, Effects, and solutions. Immediately after the awareness meetings, the communities realized most of the challenges can be solved by themselves, hence through the Community Vision committees, they started opening new community roads while others are maintaining those that were in a bad state.

Some of the communities where this is happening are Kariko, Kyatwa, Masibwe- Bunaiga, Bugarama, Ntabago B among others. The communities are in Rwenzori region and Kigezi. One of the major challenges faced by rural farmers and communities in the highland areas of Uganda is the absence of access roads. This problem affects market access for farmers in such communities who work tirelessly to make a living from farming.

Due to this road challenge, farmers end up growing only what they can eat or the extra they can carry on their heads to nearby markets. Most times, the surplus gets rotten in storage in the villages or during transit because of many hours or days spent in transporting the foodstuffs to where they are needed.



ELGON REGION HIGHLIGHTS

Elgon region was incorporated into the CommonGround project in May 2023 and started activity implementation on July 1st, 2023, with induction of the Elgon team in ISSD Kampala Head Office and CG project Headquarters in Kabarole. The Elgon team is composed of the Regional Coordinator, Agribusiness and marketing Expert, Environmental education Officer, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning officer, Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), PIP Field Supervisor and Finance and Adim Officer, and Office assistant. CommonGround Elgon Regional Office is located on Plot 42, Wanale Road, Senior Quarters, Industrial Division, Mbale City.

CommonGround in Elgon region is working with Africa 2000 Network Uganda as Implementing Partner deploying 9 Field staff. We are operating in Bududa District targeting initial 13 sub counties of Bukalasi, Bundesi, Bubita, Bumayoka, Buwali, Bufuma, Mabono, Bushiyi, Busiriwa, Bumwalukani, Nakatsi, Bunabutiti and Bushika. The identification of these sub counties was informed by the work done by the predecessor MWARES project. The project will scale to other sub counties in the following years of implementation.

Elgon region is unique in that CommonGround is building on the work done by MWARES Project (July 2019 – June 2023) in the sub counties of Bukalasi, Bushiyi, Bunabutiti and Bushika in Bududa district. MWARES project worked with farmers, schools, and other stakeholders to restore resilience and stewardship of the Manafwa watershed and focused on resilient farming, Environmental education, Landscape restoration and creating sustainable impact using the PIP Approach.

Building on this foundation, as part of CG initial activities the sub watersheds of Suume, Uuka, tsustu, Upper Manafwa and Sakusaku were established as project target sub watersheds where the 13 target sub counties fall. The Elgon team has so far worked with the respective sub counties' technical and political leaders to identify 27 target communities in Old MWARES sub counties of Bukalasi, Bushiyi, Bushika and Bunabutiti and 18 target communities in the 9 new sub counties making a total of 45 villages to start activity implementation.

The field team is establishing the number of households per sub county to guide proper planning of activities and the project scale out process. The region targets to reach 50,000 farming households within the four years. Establishing this target in Bududa district informed the collection of household lists across the district. Building on the successful launch of the project in August 2013, we plan to start with conducting the baseline, market assessment and Farming system's studies to inform in depth our project implementation strategies. It is these strategies that we shall present to the stakeholders during the planned inception meetings in the region scheduled for October 2023. We shall be holding community awareness meetings to highlight the transition and what to expect under the CommonGround project

RWENZORI REGION HIGHLIGHTS



ACDO fro one of the sub counties in Bunyangabu addressing community members during one of the awareness meetings

Rwenzori Region is one of the Highland areas where the CommonGround project is being implemented in collaboration with Joint Effort to support the Environment (JESE) and Albertine Intervention for Development (AID) in Bunyangabu and Ntoroko districts. Initially an inception meeting was held on 7th of June 2023 with district and sub-county stakeholders.

The purpose of the meeting was to; introduce CommonGround project to different stakeholders, local NGOs and staff and their This meeting gave the project a very start up with all stakeholders aware of the intentions of the project. After the inception meeting, this was followed by community awareness raising meetings which were conducted in the 12 first target communities including Masibwe, Ntabago A, Ntabago B, Bukara A&B, Kaisenda, Nyambiga, Itojo, Musandama, Nyakatoke, Kyatwa and Bukika/Kagabi.

The purpose of the community awareness meetings was like that of the inception meeting as above in addition to introducing the PIP approach. The community awareness meetings followed module 1 of PIP training guide through 6 sessions (1st to 6th session). Major achievements (February to August) 2023 There have been tremendous achievements in Rwenzori over the six months as highlighted below.

The project staff have created awareness among district and sub- county officials from Bunyangabu and Ntoroko districts through the inception meeting and the project launch. A total of 3,656 (1,824 male and 1,824 female) community members and local leaders were sensitized about the project and were able to identify their problems, draw their current situation and desired future maps. A total of 315 (PIP) innovators.

(PIs) were selected and validated as pioneers of Integrated Farm Planning (PIP) creation in the selected communities of Masibwe, Ntabago A, Ntabago B, Bukara A&B, Kaisenda, Nyambiga, Itojo, Musandama, Nyakatoke, Kyatwa and Bukika/Kagabi. Two Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were signed between Integrated Seed and Sector Development Uganda and the local Government of Bunyangabu and Ntoroko districts. And three partners meetings were held with the BRIGHT project on 4th and 13th April to harmonize areas of operations and on 2nd August 2023 to share experiences on implementation of the PIP approach.



COMMONGROUND PATHWAY ONE ALREADY WORKING TOWARDS EMPOWERING AND MOTIVATING COMMUNITIES

Under pathway 1, the project Works towards establishing resilient farming systems focusing on empowering and motivating households and communities through the Participatory Integrated Planning (PIP) approach. Therefore, through PIP approach, communities in Elgon, Kigezi and Rwenzori sub regions are empowered to become self-reliant and to farm and manage the land in balance with nature.

Hence, central to this pathway is the process of gender inclusive in PIP-creation (vision building, action planning) at the household level, which is followed by capacity building on integrated land and farm management, based on farmer-to-farmer transfer of knowledge to scale-out.

Our proposition is therefore to use the PIP approach, to support and co-develop resilient farming systems for a wide range of farmers, building on collaboration and learning, from household to community to watershed level. To effectively facilitate PIP implementation, 50 copies of PIP image boxes were printed and distributed to different field officers, and they are now used as training manuals in the communities.

PIP modules 1 & 2 were reviewed and finalized. 600 PIP innovators were selected and validated in Kigezi and Rwenzori regions. 48 (24 Rwenzori + 24 Kigezi) degraded slopes for restoration were also selected and 73 (26F and 47M) Project core staff and field staff from local implementing partners were trained in PIP approach. The training was aimed at equipping the field staff with the required knowledge and skills to deliver the PIP training.

There has been successful conducting of the PIP creation session one with PIP innovators in 20 communities (10 communities in Kigezi and 10 in Rwenzori), a set of six community awareness raising meetings conducted in 24 communities (12 villages in Kigezi and 12 in Rwenzori) and 24 target communities successfully selected and validated 25 PIP innovators.

Each community visions' committees were selected in the two degraded slopes for restoration each. Reached out to a total number of 1,193 (556 M + 637 F) in Rwenzori and 1,040 (479M + 561F) households

who participated in awareness raising in the two regions (2,233).

24 target communities have drawn the draft community visions and action plans and in each of the communities, cross-cutting issues and other training areas were identified and documented. So far, initial engagements of the communities leaders have made them own the project, all communities showed active participation during the awareness meetings, key stakeholders like the local government officials are cooperating with the team and the farming systems were successfully conducted.

There has been good representation of women during village assemblies, communities identified special topics related to gender, Sustainable Land Use Management (SLUM) and Agricultural technology. There have been continuous weekly meetings with PIs to review and plan for next activities and community awareness mindset changes and already communities are taking joint community action such as roads rehabilitation and creation trenches in some communities.



FIRST AWARENESS MEETINGS INTRODUCED CG PROJECT TO THE COMMUNITIES



After the inception meetings, community awareness creation started in the different communities following a schedule which was agreed on with the LC1s. Community awareness creation is vital as part of project roll out activities to enable all stakeholders at the district, sub-county, parish, and communities understand the objectives of the project, the implementation strategies, and their roles and responsibilities on the project. Initially, project sub-watersheds (sub-counties) and communities have been selected with support from the district officials. As such 1st and 2nd community awareness meetings were conducted in the selected 12 target villages.

The objective of these was to create awareness about the project intervention and create awareness about problems that hinder development in the project target village communities. We also shared with the communities the objectives of the project, implementation strategy and roles and responsibilities of farming communities and raised shared problems and leveling expectations. Receive feedback from the community on their input on the implementation strategies and problems that hinder development. Preliminary visits to the villages were done by field staff and supervisors to agree on the date, time, venue, and participants to attend the 1st awareness meetings. During the visits the LC1 chairpersons were briefed on the purpose of the meeting and asked to mobilize the selected participants.

The 1st awareness meetings were held between 12th to 19th June 2023 in different target villages at different venues selected

by the community leaders including churches, schools, and individual homes of the village leaders. The invited participants for the 1st awareness meeting included Chairperson LC1, Secretary LC1, Finance secretary LC1, Secretary for information, women representative on the council, youth representative on the council, Chairperson LC II, Chairperson LCIII, Parish chief, Agriculture Officer, Community Development officer among others. The meetings followed Module 1 for the 1st awareness meeting, these were an overview about CommonGround Project, Challenges facing the community and their solutions, PIP Approach, Ideas on how leaders will support the project and expectation from the project.

In all the awareness meetings, a participatory approach was used. All the village leaders were fully engaged in all discussions during the awareness meeting from the start to the end. During the discussions, issues emphasized were social, economic, and environmental problems, their causes, Effects, and solutions. Presentations were done by one individual from each group of the problems, causes, effects, and solutions. All the awareness meetings were conducted with headship of the field staff assigned to a particular community with support from CommonGround staff. After the 1st awareness meetings, each of the participants in the 1st meeting was asked to come with two or three 3 community members depending on the attendance for the 2nd awareness meeting.

Disaggregated by gender data for participants in 1st awareness meeting in Kigezi and Rwenzori regions

Kigezi				Rwenzori			
Participants	Female	Male	Total	Participants	Males	Females	Total
	118	151	269		216	126	342

SECOND AWARENESS MEETINGS ORGANIZED PARTICIPANTS TO DRAW PROBLEMS HINDERING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



After the first awareness meetings, the second awareness meetings started from 20th to 23rd June 2023. During the second awareness meetings, the LC1 leaders made a recap of what transpired in the first meeting to bring all participants on board. This meeting was aimed at organizing participants into groups to draw the problems that hinder development in their communities as well as prioritized in the first meeting under the three different themes such as social, economic, and environmental. After drawing the problems, degradation sites were identified following the previous group discussions on environmental problems, and during the plenary discussion, the two selected sites in the village were prioritized for immediate collective action. In the meetings, the LC1s welcomed the project and pointed out that they were thankful that ISSD has not disappointed their communities like other organizations that come and collect data and never appear for implementation.

They hinted at the various challenges they have

in their communities which they felt, if possible, the CommonGround project should address. This included lack of good schools, hospitals, theft, landslides, rolling boulders, clean water, and more others. In the same meetings, the Agricultural Officers (AOs) were thankful to everyone for their turn up. They pointed out that interventions in farming systems are under their docket at the subcounty. They, however, noted that it is always impossible to reach all farmers in the subcounty because of limited staffing and resources.

Hence, thanking ISSD Uganda for coming to implement the CommonGround project in their areas and they were optimistic that the gaps in farming systems and management of natural resources will be addressed in their areas. They assured farmers that they trust ISSD since they had worked with the same organization in the seed project, and that they knew ISSD would deliver to its best as they have always done in the past. This marked the end of the second awareness meetings.

THIRD AWARENESS MEETINGS KICK START THE PROCESS OF DRAWING THE DRAFT COMMUNITY VISION

The 3rd awareness meetings follow immediately after the 1st and 2nd awareness meetings respectively adhering to the Module 1 guidelines. The main objective of the 3rd meetings was to kick start the process of drawing the draft community vision. During the 3rd community awareness meeting, there was enormous support from the LC1, LC2 chairpersons who mobilized the communities and arranged venues, the LC3, Agricultural Officers, Community Development Officers and Sub-County Chiefs who have continued to participate in the meetings. The members of the Community development committees and farmer innovators (PIs) also passed the criteria and accepted the roles. The meetings were facilitated by the field officers from Joint Efforts to Save the Environment (JESE), Albertine Interventions for Development (AID), Caritas Kabale Diocese, Africa 2000 Network Uganda, ISSD-CG Field Supervisors and Experts and Management of the CG project. The meetings were participatory whereby participants were fully engaged in all discussions.

During the image box sessions, participants were able to tell the PIP principles that were elaborated in the image. Tools like the PIP image box were used to clearly explain and elaborate

the guiding principles including collaboration, integration, and empowerment. For example, integration on image 7 and 9 where husband, wife, and their children visualize together the kind of integrated farm plan they desire in future. Presentations of the community vision drawing was done by one volunteer from the Community Vision Committee. It was assessed that the volunteer understood the assignment from the presentation that was made. In addition, missing important aspects were brought forward by the participants to improve their community vision like a skilling institution, restoring of the two selected degraded sites in the community.

After the 3rd awareness meeting, each community agreed on the date and venue for the 4th awareness meeting. Each of the participants in the 3rd meeting was asked to come with two or three community members depending on their attendance for the 4th awareness meeting. In the same meetings, the presentation of PIP in practice was done. The participants were able to understand why it is important to create a vision/ a plan for example, a village vision and the importance of collective action to restore the identified degraded hotspots.



One of the Field Officers Training Communities on PIP Approach

FOURTH AWARENESS MEETING ALLOWED COMMUNITIES TO GIVE THEIR VIEW OF THE PROBLEMS IN THEIR COMMUNITY

The fourth awareness meeting is also known as the 1st community assembly and starts after the 3rd awareness meeting. This entails that the entire village attends the meeting such that village members give their view of the problems and input in the first draft the community vision of their communities. The community assemblies in the various villages took place in the week between 10th and 14th July 2023. In the meetings, the volunteers (representatives) from the previous meeting are tasked to present the results of the first three meetings concerning problems and solutions identified, as well as aspirations for change.

Using the overviews that were made as well as the drawings of the current and desired future of the community, representatives presented as communities members giving their input. They were also able to select community vision committee and farmer innovators (PIP innovators), by the help of the lead facilitators. During the selections of PIP innovators, participants forwarded names of potential PIP innovators and communities vision committee members and through raising hands, proposed people were seconded or rejected if they did not meet the criteria that were earlier on discussed.

In other communities, participants were given small papers on which they wrote three names of potential PIs, the names making up to 25 people or more were than read out by the facilitators and written on flip chart papers for the entire group to see. Inclusion of the Local council one committee members on the Community Vision committee was highly considered. After, the participants used this time to validate and complete the results by bringing in additional problems solutions and aspirations

Validation of the PIP innovators

The validation process was done in such a way that the facilitator (field staff) in each communities road out names of the selected PIP innovators. These were requested to move out of the training rooms. These were then voted for or against by raising hands one

at a time. Those voted against were replaced in the same meeting though over 95% were voted for in all communities. These meetings were finalized by re-emphasizing the roles of farmer innovators.

This step formalized their roles and responsibilities, providing them with the authority and support needed to drive the implementation of the Integrated Farm Plan (PIP). After the Community Assemblies (Awareness 4), communities were asked to prepare for the 5th awareness raising meetings.



Some of the validated PIs in one of the communities in Kigezi Region



RADIO TALK SHOWS INTRODUCED THE COMMONGROUND PROJECT TO THE PUBLIC



Radio is part of everyday life for the public especially the farmers and it is where they get information. Hence, as part of the means to introduce the CommonGround project to the public, radio talk shows were organized in all the three regions of project intervention. The purpose of the radio talk shows was to introduce the project to the public, air the activities that are to be implemented and where are our target communities. They were also to help the public understand the different organisations and the connection between ISSD and local partners as far as the implementation of the CG project is concerned, explain PIP to the community and develop a better future for their listeners.

The radio talk shows played a significant role in laying a foundation for the general public to call and share their expectations and the challenges they want to be handled. As such, communities gained an understanding of the CommonGround project, implementation

strategy and expected deliverables. Besides the talk shows, the radios aired jingles spot ads. The Jingles spot ads were in Rutooro, Rufumbira, Rukiga, Rukonjo and Rutoro and Lumasaba for easy understanding by the audience. The Jingles are short and catchy adverts that are easy to remember and can be played repeatedly throughout the day.

The sport ads helped to let people know about the project but also to call them to take part in the project activities. The talk shows and spot ads aired on local radio stations that are widely listened to in the different regions of the project operations. These were Voice of Tooro for the Rutooro and Rukonzo in Rwenzori, Voice of Muhabura for Rufumbira, Voice of Kigezi for Rukiga dialects in Kigezi and Open Gate Radio for Lugisu in Elgon region. On each talk show, we had CG Project staff, Field Officers, and the local government officials from the different regions.

THROUGH 6TH MEETINGS, COMMUNITIES ENRICH THEIR COMMUNITY VISIONS AND ACTION PLANS

The sixth awareness meetings are what is referred to as the second community assembly. During this meeting members of the communities were all invited to enrich their community visions and action plans. The participants of this meeting included all community members together with their leaders. In the meetings, a participatory approach was used where one of the volunteers made a presentation of the current and future situations drafts made by the Community Vision Committee.

Afterwards, they took on the facilitating role of inviting anyone with an input on the drawing such that the problem can be exhaustively in the drawing. This took around 30 minutes. After the presentation of the current situation, another volunteer presented the future situation of the communities with all aspirations incorporated. This attracted a lot of attention from the community members. However, for certain communities where the drawings done had over ambitious aspirations, it was agreed that these be removed and more realistic and achievable be incorporated. The action plan is an important document which

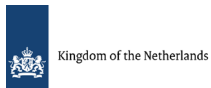
acts as a road map to achieving the aspirations incorporated in the communities vision. This was also presented by one of the members of the community vision committee. Community members agreed on some materials/resources they can provide as a community and finally agreed on the start dates for collective action. During the 5th and 6th community awareness meetings, there was massive support from the LC1, LC2 chairpersons who mobilized the communities and arranged venues, the LC3, Agricultural Officers, Community Development Officers, Sub-County Chiefs who have continued to participate in the meetings. The members of the Community Vision committees and farmer innovators (PIP innovators) who were validated after the 6th meeting and confirmed their suitability to serve as PIP innovators.

The meetings were facilitated by the field officers from Joint Efforts to Save the Environment (JESE), Albertine Interventions for Development (AID), Caritas Kabale Diocese, Africa 2000 Network Uganda, ISSD-CG Field Supervisors and Experts and Management of the CG project.

PICTORIAL







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