



DCED

The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development

Sowing Change: **Women in Food Systems** **and Climate Change**

Disclaimer

There is a dominant narrative that portrays women as victims of climate change. This brief is part of a series of examples that challenges this view, portraying women as active agents of change, in the hope of inspiring donors to advance women's economic empowerment to address climate change. Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCEd) members helped the Canopy Lab team identify the women featured in the briefs as examples of innovation. We thank the women that generously shared their experiences with us.

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Introduction









Climate change is increasing the risk of climate disasters, including droughts and floods, which is impacting **global food systems, threatening people's livelihoods and their access to food.**

In addition, global food production is a major emitter of greenhouse gas emissions **caused by human activity.** This means it is crucial to take actions to both protect food systems from the effects of climate change, while also ensuring they are not part of the problem.



Sowing change: Women in Food Systems and Climate Change

This brief showcases the experiences of women who participated in donor-supported projects working to improve food systems for the purposes of addressing climate adaptation, mitigation, and women’s economic empowerment, as well as outcomes related to food security, sovereignty, and nutrition. It presents positive changes stemming from the initiatives and the design features that enabled these. Interviews were conducted with women participating in the projects, project implementers, and donors.

| | UGANDAN PROJECTS | SEPIN, NIGERIA |
|---------------------|---|--|
| TARGETED RECIPIENTS | Individual women | Women farmers’ cooperatives, comprised of a cluster of groups |
| INCLUSION | HIGH (individual women selected to ensure most vulnerable were included)  | HIGH (mix of representatives from Internally Displaced Persons, returnees, and host communities)  |
| EMPOWERMENT | HIGH (increased decision-making for women in their households)  | HIGH (increased productivity, income and increase in women in leadership)  |
| ENVIRONMENT | MEDIUM (indications that some women were better prepared for drought)  | MEDIUM (indication crops are more drought resistant and erosion has reduced)  |
| SUSTAINABILITY | LOW (concern that the project activities will not continue when the funding ends)  | MEDIUM (cooperative intend to continue running, and other women have been copying them)  |



Women in food systems

Climate Resilience

Food Systems

Over one third of the world's working women are employed in **agri-food systems**, and in developing countries women are essential to **small-scale agriculture, farm labour and day-to-day family subsistence**. But there are gender inequalities due to discriminatory social norms that hinder women from accessing agricultural information, technologies, opportunities, resources and services and a

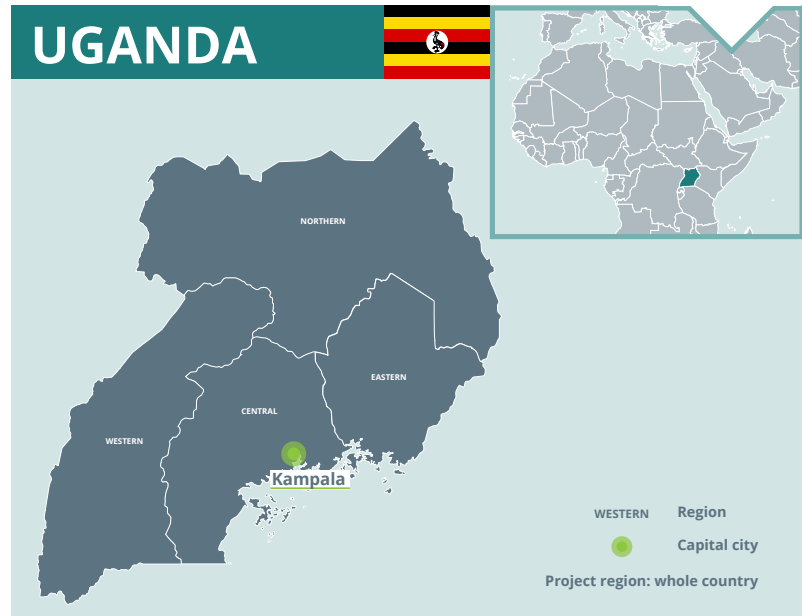
higher unpaid care responsibility affecting productivity and remuneration for **women farmers**. In addition, customary rights and laws often make it harder or even prohibit women from owning land: **only 15% of land globally is owned by women** while 43% of agricultural workers are women. Closing these gender gaps in agricultural productivity and employment would not only increase global

gross domestic product by nearly \$1 trillion, it would also reduce the number of food-insecure people by **45 million**. Intensifying climate disasters are affecting the livelihoods of communities dependent on the agricultural sector, and gender inequality means that women and children suffer disproportionately from the **adverse effects of climate change**.

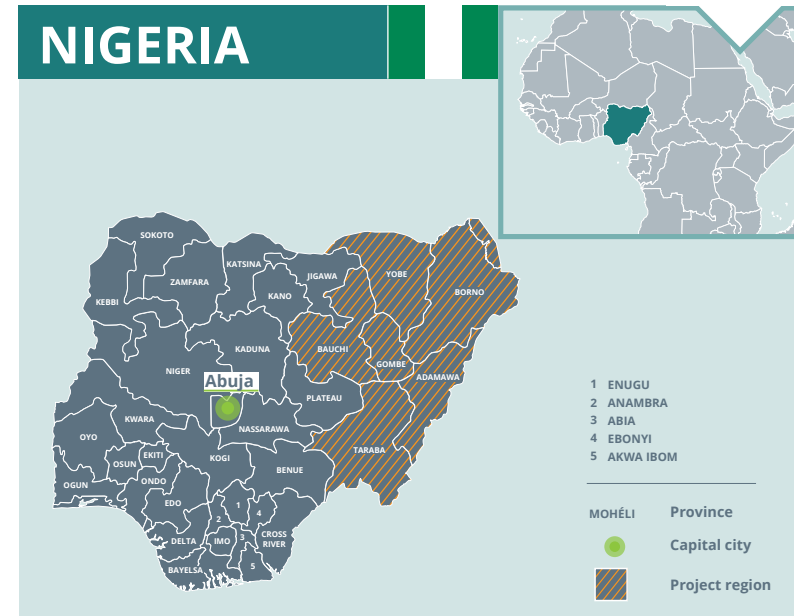
This brief highlights the determinants of success and lessons that women shared with the research team. Their experiences can serve as inspiration for the development of support packages from donors to similar women-led initiatives in the food systems sector.



This brief primarily focuses on these two donor-supported, women-led initiatives:



‘Strengthening Women Smallholders’ Resilience to Agricultural Shocks for Enhanced Income Diversification and Empowerment in Uganda’ supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the **Feed the Future Advancing Local Leadership, Innovation and Networks (ALL-IN) programme**, and the project ‘Smallholder women farmers in Uganda’s cattle corridor’ (**WOSFER**) supported by Global Affairs Canada (GAC), both implemented by Makerere University in Uganda amongst others.



The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH supported **Social and economic participation of returnees, internally displaced persons, and host communities in Northeast Nigeria (SEPIN project)**, implemented by NURU Nigeria.

Increasing women's resilience to climate change in Uganda



**Dr. Kyoheirwe Muhanguzi
Florence, Makerere
University**

“Strengthening Women Smallholders’ Resilience to Agricultural Shocks for Enhanced Income Diversification and Empowerment in Uganda” (ALL-IN) was a three-year study to rigorously evaluate a combination of interventions that sought to increase women’s productivity, empowerment, and resilience to shocks. The **“Building Women Smallholder Farmers’ empowerment and adaptive capacities: A pathway to Enhancing women’s Resilience to climate change in Uganda”** (WOSFER) project aims to enhance women’s resilience to climate change in Uganda.

The focus area is the cattle corridor, a region highly susceptible to climate change shocks. The programme’s objectives include strengthening women’s empowerment and adaptive capacities, examining gender norms affecting resilience, and identifying economic and political trade-offs in climate adaptation decisions. Dr. Kyoheirwe Muhanguzi Florence from Makerere University shared her insights having worked on both projects with the team.





INCLUSION

Inclusion of the most vulnerable women.

The WOSFER project was able to identify a diverse group of women, facing intersectional challenges, to enable them to access support.

Dr. Muhanguzi said that her team was “going into communities and selecting women aged between 18 to 34, and 35 to 55, and then 55 and above, ensuring that we included persons with disabilities” as part of the beneficiary pool.

Design features that contributed to the outcome of inclusion: Dr. Muhanguzi highlighted the importance of engaging individual women rather than women’s groups. Previous projects she had worked on focused solely on women’s groups, where as a result, some women who would have benefited from an empowerment project (the most vulnerable) were left out. From this learning, WOSFER used an approach that recognizes the diversity within communities and aims for inclusivity.





ACCESS

Access to assets and opportunities to advance economically.

Dr. Muhanguzi observed positive changes among participants, such as improved livelihoods, and livelihood diversification in on- and off-farm income-generating activities that also promoted climate resilience. Participants have been able to use money from revolving funds¹ to start businesses, buy seeds and fertiliser, improve their garden, and rent land.

Design features that contributed to the outcome of access: Dr. Muhanguzi said that she had found that training agricultural extension officers to support women as they transition



to climate-resilient agriculture was a successful tactic. Projects she has been involved in have also set up a revolving fund that enable women to implement climate-smart agricultural practice by giving them access to appropriate agricultural inputs. At the same time, project implementers have found that government-supported extension services are not benefiting women as they should because extension officers expect to be paid for travel costs, which many women farmers cannot afford. Dr. Muhanguzi intends to engage policy makers to address this challenge.

SIDE NOTE

¹ “A revolving fund is often established with capital that does not need to be repaid, but can be replenished through charges made for the goods and services produced as a result of the initial capital.”





AGENCY

Agency within the household.

Dr. Muhanguzi attributes improvements in women's agency to a three-day training provided to couples where they were given space to discuss the impact of gender norms on their economic and social lives. Because of this training, she shared that there have been cases where women are not only contributing to their household economically but are also able to make decisions about how these resources are used, and this is because the husband had attended the training.

Design features that contributed to the outcome of agency: The projects Dr. Muhanguzi supports follow a gender transformative approach², so a significant aspect of the project includes the involvement of couples in training sessions, facilitating discussions on gender norms and decision-making within households. Dr. Muhanguzi assessed this as key to implementing related climate-smart agriculture practices, saying: "Women cannot use resources unless men are convinced that they also benefit from empowerment".

SIDE NOTE

² An approach that seeks to actively examine, challenge and transform the underlying causes of gender inequality rooted in inequitable social structures and institutions.





ENVIRONMENT

Improved resilience to climate change.

The regions in which the projects that Dr. Muhanguzi supports operate face issues of drought, flooding, landslides, hailstorms, and erratic rainfall. She stated that establishing results linked to increased resilience to climate change requires more data analysis, particularly regarding the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices. However, she had some initial observations that the women who were implementing climate-smart agriculture were better prepared, and hence were not as negatively impacted as others when droughts occurred.

Design features that contributed to environmental outcomes: Dr. Muhanguzi shared that two elements that worked well included the provision of training in climate-smart agriculture, and the provision of timely **weather information** through women-friendly digital innovations. In addition, because men had attended couples' training sessions, they were supportive of women using resources to implement climate-smart agriculture practices, even contributing their own resources.





SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability beyond project completion.

Dr. Muhanguzi was clear that without donor funding, the initiatives would not continue despite the establishment of a revolving fund structure: “The funding that we have now ends in 2024. We know that some women were given money, and we would want the money to keep moving around within the groups. But we have not seen an indication that we will get more funding to continue after that. If it were possible, it would be good to continue with monitoring and guiding the women on how to use the revolving fund”.

Design features that contributed to the outcome of sustainability: The women were given money for use in the revolving fund and were trained on gender responsive business, business management and entrepreneurship.



Supporting women farmers' cooperatives in Northern Nigeria



Mrs. Bless Dimighi,
Secretary of a farmer's
cooperative

The SEPIN project is working with women farmer associations in North-eastern Nigeria to improve individual and organizational economic capacities in climate smart practices. They do this to enhance food systems using climate adaptive crops, promoting fast growing legumes and organic fertilizer, and providing weather advisory services.

SEPIN is targeting returnees (formerly Nigerian migrants and refugees in other countries), internally displaced persons, and vulnerable members of host communities. To implement the project, GIZ works in partnership with a local NGO, **NURU Nigeria**. Ms. Bless Dimighi, Secretary of her farmer's cooperative, and Ms. Ramatu Yahaya, Financial Secretary of her cooperative, shared their insights with the team.



Ms. Ramatu Yahaya,
Financial Secretary
of a farmers' cooperative



INCLUSION

Inclusion of women from different groups in the farmers' cooperatives.

Ms. Dimighi shared that there is diversity within their Farmer Organisations³ with respect to age, disability, ethnicity, and religion. Her colleague Ms. Yahaya, stated that benefits from the project are shared equally among the groups. Ms. Dimighi said “**none are left behind**”.

Design features that contributed to the outcome: The women's collectives involved in SEPIN are clubs, each consisting of 15–25 members. In Ms. Dimighi and Ms. Yahaya's communities, clusters of clubs have come together to form cooperatives.

GIZ expected clusters to include a mix of representatives from internally displaced persons (IDP), returnees, and host communities, and encouraged implementing partner NURU to ensure this mix and include other types of women in situations of exclusion such as women who have been victims of domestic violence.

SIDE NOTE

³ “An agricultural Cooperative, also known as farmers' cooperative, is a form of cooperative formed by farmers or agriculturalists who have combined their resources together for the production and marketing of their produce.” <https://nou.edu.ng/coursewarecontent/CRD%20413-AGRICULTURE%20%20COOPERATIVES.pdf>





ACCESS

Access to agricultural inputs and increased income.

Ms. Dimighi and Ms. Yahaya shared that because of the project's interventions, their crop yields have increased by around 30%. This has led to increased food security and improving household nutrition, and they have been able to sell the surplus. In Ms. Dimighi's words, **"there is a great difference between the crop yield now and before. Before we could not generate enough to feed us the whole year, but now we can"**. Another positive, collective, outcome is that the cooperatives have been saving together. According to GIZ, women's associations have saved 15 million Naira⁴, and women's cooperatives jointly own the farming equipment provided by the project, which generates income for their groups. They share dividends amongst their members.

Design features that contributed to access as an outcome: The project provided capacity building in farming, business, and nutrition through the promotion of vegetable gardens, and has provided some assets like livestock (sheep) and harvesting equipment. The project also provides soil testing and weather information. The project also supported members to establish Village Savings and Loans Associations.

SIDE NOTE

4 Approximately 10,787.67 USD





AGENCY

*Women's economic empowerment – agency:
women in leadership.*

Ms. Yahaya shared that the project has improved social cohesion and collective action in her community. For example, group members help one another if a member is bereaved or sick, using funds from the group's savings to aid that person. In addition, women are now more willing to take up leadership positions and they have the support of their husbands: **“women are empowering themselves to take up positions, to take care of themselves and their children”** (Ms. Yahaya).

Design features that contributed to agency as an outcome:
SEPIN project documentation indicates the project is **“raising awareness on gender equality and equity among men in the communities – including traditional and religious authorities.”**





ENVIRONMENT

Environment: reducing erosion and improving drought resistance.

Ms. Dimighi has observed that there has been a reduction in soil erosion, and their crops are better able to weather dry spells: "if the rain does not come, our crops can now survive a dry spell, and the trees we have planted have stopped water from washing away the soil".

Design features that contributed to environmental outcomes: Farming training covered climate smart practices such as planting crops to reduce erosion and using organic pesticides and drought resistant seed varieties: "we were taught how to plant crops to stop erosion, to not use chemical pesticides but instead organic, to not uproot soy plants, but cut them and leave the roots in the soil, to plant trees and to use improved seed varieties to make crops weather resistant" (Ms. Dimighi).





SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability beyond project completion

Ms. Dimighi and Ms. Yahaya were optimistic: both said they plan to continue their cooperatives' activities after the project ends. Ms. Yahaya said that in her community other women, not in her cooperative, are asking to participate in trainings and are forming their own groups to emulate the SEPIN farmers associations **"because they have seen the benefits, unity and achievements of the group"**.

GIZ is confident some groups will continue operating after the project will close. This is based on a precedent from a previous project for which 40% of groups still exist. GIZ is also seeing an increased demand for paid-for extension services, which is a sign of behaviour change and indicates participants are not relying on free services provided by the project.

Design features that contributed to the outcome: SEPIN used demonstration farms from the outset. Beyond demonstration farms, the intention to have a demonstration effect was explicitly included from the design stage of the project – it was intended that 'indirect beneficiaries' (community members not participating in the project) would observe the benefits experienced by project participants and adopt the same practices as the participants.



Lessons learned for donors and project implementers

If you found the above inspiring, here are some suggestions for how you can design a programme that will support women's economic empowerment and sustainable food system outcomes:

- **Design for inclusivity and intersectionality:**

All projects presented in this brief had a mandate for inclusion, either by the selection of individuals (WOSFER), or within clusters of groups (SEPIN). WOSFER's implementers found that while women's groups offer structured platforms for engagement, there's a risk of excluding the most vulnerable individuals as they would not belong to women collectives to begin with. In SEPIN, the clusters of clubs were formed for the purpose of the donor-supported initiative, and the donor asked that the implementing partner ensure these groups represent the

communities targeted by the project. Interviewees confirmed these groups are inclusive.

- **Targeting women's cooperative groups:**

The SEPIN case illustrates the benefits of targeting (or even forming) women's cooperatives to address the challenges to women's economic empowerment such as access to financing and agricultural extension services. In the SEPIN example, having women jointly own the farming equipment was beneficial in terms of both their economic empowerment and, as part of this, having control over agricultural resources

- **Ensure extension services for women farmers:**

Projects working in food systems need to ensure women farmers can access agricultural extension services. In the future, WOSFER intends to tackle the public provision of extension services, whereas SEPIN is

promoting demand for paid-for extension services. WOSFER's implementers reflected that it will be essential to engage policymakers to address systemic challenges, such as access to extension services. Advocating for policy changes to better support vulnerable communities is crucial for sustaining project impacts beyond its duration. In SEPIN, the project is seeing an increase in demand for paid-for extension services, which can be a positive indicator of sustainability of a project's outcomes.

- **Include men in the project to achieve women's economic empowerment:**

The Ugandan project implementers highlighted the importance of engaging both men and women in project activities to address power dynamics within households effectively.

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